

**School of Design and Art**

**Tam Giao Cultural Expression and Representations of Postwar Trauma  
in the Vietnamese Visual Arts**

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

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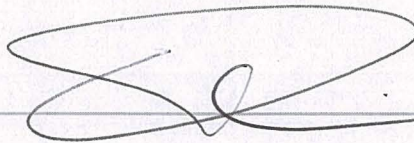
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## **Abstract**

This study identifies Tam Giao, a combination of three philosophies, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism that has been reflected in the Vietnamese visual arts, and examines the role of Tam Giao in the visual representation of the Vietnamese postwar period after 1975. It examines the forms of Tam Giao cultural expression and representation of postwar trauma in the Vietnamese visual arts between 1985 and 2014 and investigates how Tam Giao artists use their Buddhist experience in relation to Vietnamese cultural practices and traditions to represent this postwar period and its traumas in their artworks. This examination of the postwar phenomena is divided into three periods, 1985–1995, 1995–2005 and 2005–2014.

The thesis explores how artists use Vietnamese literature and traditions in the presentation of their political expression, and examines their opinions of the impact of global art in the postwar period in Vietnam. The research historically contextualises interviews undertaken with Vietnamese artists who use post-traumatic themes in their artworks revealing how Tam Giao cultural expression reflects on individuals and the community. The forms of postwar trauma are codified and illustrated through artistic case studies.

The research reveals an evolving national visual culture that draws on a wide number of sources as individual artists renegotiate their relationship to traditional artistic and aesthetic practices as they find voice expressing their responses to postwar trauma in its many forms.

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## Introduction

Tam Giao culture and art have long been a passionate concern of mine. One of the roles of the visual arts is to record our feelings of happiness, love, depression and anxiety through artworks, even though these feelings may be expressed differently from culture to culture. Western audiences are often curious about why Tam Giao art does not reflect these feelings or express the concerns of its people, as history shows that the visual arts narrate human history and reflects the cultural, social and political changes in each era. This research offers Western audiences an answer, revealing how the trauma of war has been expressed in artworks using Tam Giao means. This research posed the question: What is the role of Tam Giao culture in the visual representation of Vietnamese postwar traumas between 1985 and 2014? In attempting to answer this question, I involved artists, critics, writers, researchers and art collectors.

This research has been conducted by a Vietnamese-Australian artist-researcher, who was born in Hanoi, lived in Ho Chi Minh City and taught at the Vietnam University of Fine Arts. Since 1991, I have been living in Australia as a migrant, distanced from traditional Vietnamese culture for 24 years, and has aimed to examine the research topic for an audience who wants to access, or understand, the expression of war traumas in the Vietnamese Tam Giao culture.

The research has focused on a group of artists in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, who produced artworks in which they represented their postwar traumas after the Vietnam War, which ended in 1975. Their work needs to be contextualised within the unfolding changes in the world of art. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a development in the visual arts was noted by Smith (2011), who proposed that the many diverse currents of the visual arts were combining to become an 'art of a whole world' (p. 13). The Vietnamese visual arts have slowly become part of that globalised program of art practice, and the Vietnamese arts have never before been so complicated or so engaged in such a diversity of expression.

This thesis will identify the changes in the Vietnamese visual arts and explain how they reflect the most fundamental principles behind the cultural changes in postwar

Vietnamese society. The kind of cultural changes shown in Vietnamese visual representation are the expansion of national and individual identity after 1985, the economic development of the postwar period and its conflicts, and the international art influences on Vietnamese art. This thesis uses a qualitative research methodology, including an ethnographical approach, to extend the historical examination of the role of culture in artworks representing postwar Vietnamese in the period of study.

The thesis begins with an explanation of Vietnamese Tam Giao cultural development from 111 BC until the period of French colonisation. It reveals an emphasis on the practice of Confucianism in an attempt to keep national identity intact, even under the communist regime in the North. Following the explanation of historical cultural changes, the thesis progresses to a discussion of postwar trauma. In this investigation into the phenomena of Vietnamese trauma, trauma is divided into two types: psychological trauma and cultural trauma.

After introducing how Tam Giao shaped the Vietnamese visual arts in general, the discussion explains three factors: symbol, metaphor and feeling, and the relationships between them. These three factors, which are irreducible and have intercausative roles, are explained through a series of case studies, the aim being to facilitate understanding of war art or the depiction of traumas in Tam Giao culture.

The research addresses the differing cultural values and aesthetic standards that can vary the ways in which the same war trauma contexts are expressed visually. In the analysis of the aesthetic values of different cultures, the discussion uses a 'compare-and-contrast' method. This provides context for a Western point of view in understanding Tam Giao art. The explanation demonstrates how art of different cultures can be appreciated by extending knowledge through the use of 'feeling' theory (see Chapter 3). Using this theory, the audience can appreciate art from outside their cultural context via objective perception. The meaning of art from different cultures can be captured aesthetically, but I argue against using the formal Western aesthetic cannon to appreciate Tam Giao cultural elements. A Western aesthetic standard is not the only standard for appreciating artworks; in addition, its criteria are limited when applied to Tam Giao art or representation. The relationship between the aesthetic similarities between Western and Eastern expressions of trauma is also clarified and the use of symbols and metaphorical devices explained. The use of figurative language is also discussed in the depiction of artists' war

trauma. To illustrate this, the thesis references Picasso's artwork *Guernica* (see Figure 5) to show not only the artist's efforts to depict his feelings but also how he found a specifically Western way of using figurative expression as an instrument for depicting his traumatic theme. To analyse Vietnamese art, it is important to understand the use of culturally specific figurative and metaphorical language used in the expression of political knowledge. Metaphorical models and analogies emerge from everyday usage, and post-1985 artistic development included both conventional and hybrid metaphors.

The distinction between conventional and unconventional modes of expression in Tam Giao art can be understood by examining each of the three Tam Giao beliefs as reflected in artworks. In an analysis focusing on the Vietnamese postwar context of trauma, figurative language and metaphorical expression is revealed as an essential device used by artists to express their ideas and political opinions in political conditions that made it difficult for artists to display their work in public. The use of metaphor in each period of Vietnamese art history is mapped out. For example, two fairy figures have been used to represent postwar traumas in two different eras. One was created in the seventeenth century, the other in the twentieth century. Both show different ways of using metaphor to express the artist's political and cultural knowledge. These Taoist-Buddhist metaphorical elements reveal the hybrid adaptation of a seventeenth century conventional metaphor for use as a contemporary hybrid metaphor for trauma.

This thesis examines the role and development of Tam Giao culture through an analysis of two groups of artists who have worked, exhibited and been recognised internationally since 1985. The artworks from Group 1 (1985–95) narrate the social and political events of the decade after the Vietnam War. The works from Group 2 (1996–2005) express the complex environment in Vietnam associated with globalisation. Smith (2011, p. 12) describes the phenomenon of contemporary artists producing 'global art' in a 'global world'. In Vietnam, artists from both groups represent their opinions through the use of increasingly diverse forms of art.

I interviewed 28 art participants in Vietnam for this research, the context of discussion being the steadily developing Vietnamese economy and the conflicts in both political and social development after 1985—the year the Doi Moi Policy was announced (see Appendix 8)—that this has caused. The developmental issues reflect the global influences, which brought about the cultural changes discussed in

the case studies in Chapters 3 and 4. The cultural changes in Vietnam have been framed through three causal relationships: economic adaptation to Western methods, leadership conflicts between feudalism communism (Confucianism) and democratic communism, and information about global art practices flooding into Vietnam. I have applied Sztompka's six stages of traumatic sequence (Sztompka, 2004, pp. 168–9) in my analysis of the artworks of Doi Moi artists.

This discussion of artworks examines in depth the role of cultural change in adapting to the Vietnamese postwar environment. The profoundly changing culture of individuals and community is a complex phenomenon, and the research investigates the subtle changes that took place between the transformation of feudalism communism that existed pre-1985 (before the Doi Moi Policy was announced, see Appendix 37) into democratic communism after 1985 (see Appendix 38). Post-1985, the rejection of Confucianism in favour of democratic communism profoundly affected everyday cultural values. An exploration of the changing social system and new leadership contributes to the discussion, providing a perspective on the Vietnamese postwar theme reflected in artworks from 2005–14. In their effective pursuit of new artistic strategies, not only do artists seek Tam Giao cultural elements for their work but also artists' new expressive demands show an evolving hybrid figurative. The new forms of global contemporary art adopted by Vietnamese performance artists contribute to the 'palette' of ways to express postwar traumas through the visual arts.

The intention of this thesis is to reveal how the Vietnamese visual arts responded to the varying contexts of postwar trauma by using diverse metaphor methods, which show the revolutionary move away from conventional Tam Giao customs in order to adapt to social change and make political expression manifest. In doing so, this research marks a turning point in Vietnamese cultural development towards new ways of expressing political themes, reflecting the complex phenomena of postwar Vietnam between 1985 and 2014.

## **Literature Review and Contextual Background**

The Vietnamese nation has had four different names during its historical development: Lacviet was the first official name of Vietnam prior to 111 BC, from 111 BC to 934 was the pre-Dai Viet period, from 934 to 1883 was the Dai Viet period, and since 1883 it has been known as Vietnam. During the Dai Viet period, there was significant cultural development. The country was independent, with an established Vietnamese cultural, national and individual identity. A small country, Vietnam's attraction lies in its resources and position, and it has had to defend itself in many wars. The people of Vietnam have experienced war traumas throughout the centuries, and have always had their own ways of expressing their war traumas and of adapting to a newly forming society.

My research focuses on how Vietnamese people have drawn on their experiences, as a means to cope with their postwar traumas through the visual arts between 1985 and 2014. The examination includes an analysis of past civil wars, which caused cultural traumas for the Vietnamese people. In these circumstances, artists drew on Tam Giao philosophy to represent their ideas. Tam Giao beliefs and customs include Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian elements.

This contextual backgrounding and literature review discusses several scholarly theories around cultural traumas. Alexander (2004) presents the framework to which most scholars refer when identifying the process of cultural trauma, and this framework has been used in this literature review to identify Vietnamese cultural trauma after 1975. Vietnamese culture and the visual arts in war contexts after the Doi Moi Policy (see Appendix 8) in 1986 are examined. The history of the influence of Tam Giao culture on artistic expression is discussed, focusing on the contemporary period since 1985.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Philosophy and religion**

The nineteenth-century philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach reasoned that there are no supernatural entities—deities are projections, objectifications of people's fears and desires. The supernatural world is imaginary; only the material world exists (Fisher,



2002, p. 17). Sigmund Freud described religion as a 'universal obsessional neurosis—a cosmic projection and relaying of the loving and fearful relationships that we had with our parents' (cited in Caruth, 2005a, p. 17). Others believe that religions are created to—or at least are used to—manipulate people. In 1962 Karl Marx argued that a culture's religion, as well as all other aspects of its social structure, emerges from its economic framework. In Marx's view, religion is a tool for oppressing people, a mirror of an unjust economic structure. However, Jiddue Krishnamurti (cited in Caruth, 2005a, p. 90) argued that it is possible for religion to enhance a person's mental health and help mature development:

It appears that throughout the world man has always been seeking something beyond his own death, beyond his own problem, something that will be enduring, true and timeless. He has called it God, he has given it many names; and most of us believe in something of that kind, without ever actually experiencing it. (p. 90)

Vietnamese philosophy generally describes its cultural and ethical ideals through the values of Buddhism, while also incorporating the beliefs of Taoism and the virtues of Confucianism. The blending of these three philosophies is called *Tam Giao* in Vietnamese culture and has been reflected in the Vietnamese visual arts throughout the centuries. Before 111 BC, Lacviet was structured as villages before becoming a nation. The village system included three main aspects: there was a bond between village members, the village members were loyal to their village's own rules and each village held polytheist beliefs (Ha, 1987, pp. 8 & 47). Fisher (2002), Nguyen and Le (2012) and Irons (2008) discuss how Buddhism spread from India throughout East Asia and to Vietnam in the pre-Dai Viet period. Taoism and Confucianism came from China at the same time. The co-evolution of these religious ideas and philosophies occurred in the Vietnamese community over the last 2,000 years.

These three belief systems imported into Vietnam in the pre-Dai Viet period later combined into one belief system called *Tam Giao* (three philosophies) in Vietnam. Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism have a long tradition of thriving in Vietnam in their respective cultural contexts and periods of history. The major fundamental characteristics of these beliefs have been modified during each historical period to suit a variety of social systems, including democracies and dictatorships (Irons, 2008, pp. xvi–xvii).

Buddhist philosophy explains the causes of human suffering as rooted in human desires and ambitions and shows how human salvation from suffering relies solely on our own efforts. The core ideas of Buddhist theory emphasise human strength, for when we understand how we create suffering for ourselves, we can then become free (Irons, 2008, pp. xv–xvi). Buddhism also explains how to observe spiritual development: ‘you must be your own lamp, as a Buddhist, you become your own by continually looking on your feelings, perceptions, moods and ideas in such a manner that they conquer the desires, and depressions of ordinary men, and they should be always determined, self-possessed and collected in mind’ (Fisher, 2002, p. 78).

Buddhism is a major religion in Vietnam, not only as a means of teaching how to achieve a tranquil life and to avoid depression but also as a psychological system for coping with many types of traumas, such as wars, natural disasters and health problems. Temples and pagodas are centres where people can seek emancipation through their own strength, engaging with the concept of ‘Buddha’ in the form of images in order to gain confidence and reduce their anxiety or stress. According to Irons (2008, p. 545) and Phan (1997a, p. 17) the majority of the Vietnamese population were Buddhist since 111 BC, Pre Dai Viet period, and used Buddhism not only for an understanding of Buddha’s teachings but also for emotional support. After the end of each war during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the number of new pagodas under construction increased (Irons, 2008; Phan, 1997a). The seventeenth-century Vietnamese Buddhist sculpture *Buddha of thousand eyes and thousand hands* (Phan, 1997a, Figure 12, p. 75) produced at the end of the King Le and Lord Trinh Civil War is evidence of how artists interpreted Buddhist theories. The sculpture has many open hands, which emanate from the Buddha’s body, representing his power. The work represents the feelings of Buddhists seeking the Buddha’s protection (Ha, 1987, p.23). Buddhism in Vietnam has three functions. The first is to teach how to identify and develop individuality; the second is as a resource in the form of a psychological support; and the third is as a powerful idea generating political and social development. This last function was evident in the Dai Viet period (934–1883) when the state developed its greatest achievements. The leading Buddhist scholars were involved in governments and controlled the nation.

### *Taoism and its features in Vietnam*

Fisher (2002) explains that while Hinduism was born in India, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism grew mainly in China and in East Asia, including Vietnam. The Taoist tradition has its foundations in China in 300 BC, later spreading to Vietnam. The philosophical basis of Taoism is that one can best harmonise with the natural flow of life by being receptive and quiet. The Taoist scholar Chuang-tzu (Zhuang Zhou) elaborated on the way to apply this philosophy, asserting that the best way to live in a chaotic, absurd civilisation is to become detached from it (Fisher, 2002, p. 108).

There are several basic principles for life in harmony with Taoism in China. The first is to experience the transcendent unity of all things rather than their separation. Everything has its own nature and function regardless of how disfigured or beautiful, small or large. They are all one in Tao. Second, Taoism is concerned with direct experience of the universe, with accepting things as they are—not measuring things against human standards of morality or labelling them as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Taoism also teaches that people should take action without ego-assertion. Third, whether in a peaceful or a chaotic environment, the Taoist seeks to find the still centre, saving energy for those times when action is needed, and to take a humble and quiet approach to life (Vu, 2001, p. 25; Fisher, 2002, p. 108).

According to Nguyen and Le (2012 p. 267), this Taoism aimed to explain the sequences of nature and the belief that humanity should not interfere. However, Vietnamese people modified this philosophy to suit their traditions and customs. Ha (1987, p. 35) describes how Taoism in the Dai Viet period amalgamated with polytheism and Buddhism. Taoist symbolic images are found in most pagodas and temples in Vietnam. These images are presented behind or adjacent to Buddhist images in many places. Buddhism adapted in this period, incorporating Taoist influences. Subsequently, the Buddha acquired some magical characteristics drawn from aspects of Taoism. The Vietnamese people began to use stories and characters from real life to create polytheist symbols for worshipping, and these characters then became permanent images for ritual activities in pagodas or temples. In every village, people who were regarded as psychics influenced the community or individuals on the ways of Taoism. Children absorbed this Taoist-Buddhist system by observing their families engaging in ritual activities in the temples.

### *Confucianism in Vietnam*

Confucianism focuses on ways of developing a society. The Tao represents the transcendental world, and the Confucian idea of human relationships represents them in the human world. It is the Tao that creates the character of these human relations (Fisher, 2002, p. 114). In Vietnam, Confucianism has been used to frame Vietnamese identity; in particular, the use of the five virtues to develop individual identity based on Confucianism was established in the Dai Viet period. Two social classes facilitated the establishment of Confucian ideology: the royal officer group and the upper working class (Nguyen & Le, 2012, pp. 466–531). Hershock and Ames (2006) observe that in China individuals practised Confucian virtues concerned with self-improvement rather than with public recognition using the five basic relationships of kindness, gentility, righteous behaviour and obedience, humane consideration, and benevolence. According to Nguyen & Phan (1995, pp. 7–8), the Vietnamese people, however, constructed the five virtues from their version of Confucianism to suit their social and political purposes: knowledge of life and universe, knowledge of army and war, the quality of bravery, the values of humanity and sincerity, and trustworthiness and loyalty. They believed that the appropriate practice of these virtues held great value following historical antecedent. Another aspect of Vietnamese Confucianism is that society was arranged as a family in which members got along with each other. People were able to attain Confucian virtues through the practice of daily traditions and customs developed from ancient values that were seen as the path to harmony in the individual, the family and the nation.

Ham (2007, pp. 9–14) explains how Vietnamese identity began to form in the Dai Viet period and to emerge with its own culture, national literature and educational and political institutions. This period established a distinctly Vietnamese monarchist rule in Dai Viet's last 900 years. Confucianism was emphasised in governmental structures. For example, King Le Thanh Tong imposed a Confucian political order, with an intricately layered hierarchy of six ministries and their executive departments, which, in turn, formed and implemented policies. In this 900-year period of independent development, governments and individuals established Vietnamese Confucian traditions incorporated with Buddhist and Taoist influences, which became Vietnamese Tam Giao culture.

Dai Viet, the new name of the nation since 1831 (Bui, 2010, p. 69), was changed to Vietnam. The nation was divided into two regimes in 1954: in the North, the Confucian communists took power, while in the South, Confucian capitalism began to develop (Davies & McKay, 2012, pp. 44–51). Both governments used the ideology of Tam Giao, focusing on Confucianism. In the North, Ho Chi Minh, ‘Uncle Ho’, the president of North Vietnam, encouraged people to see the whole nation as a family; he also emphasised the concept of unity when the nation was at war, referring to the war as the ‘Peoples’ War’. In the South, Ngo Dinh Diem, ‘Father Diem’, the president of South Vietnam, gave his family members control of the government, which was a debased type of Confucian order.

Marr & White (1988) note that Vietnam’s educational system is a legacy of both Confucianism and colonialism. They also note that after the Vietnam War, Vietnam’s economy was an empty chest, which was to lead to cultural changes for future generations of the Vietnamese people. The practice of Confucianism in Vietnam changed after 1975 (Marr & White, 1988, pp. 1–9); after the long period of devastation, making money became the most important thing for every family. The concept of how to be Confucian was changing in the new setting. Tam Giao beliefs and concepts were still maintained in the relationships and vernacular spoken between parents, children and friends. However, in the new economic environment, the values and the five virtues of Confucianism have become impossible to practice.

Marxism spread to Vietnam from Russia (Ham, 2007, pp. 32–3); the Vietnamese communist government continued to use the traditional Confucianist leadership, especially during the Ho Chi Minh and Ngo Dinh Diem regimes prior to 1975. Confucian feudalism, featuring the five Confucian characters (see Appendix 1), was practiced in both North and South Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Both Ho Chi Minh and Ngo Dinh Diem demonstrated their personal interest in the Confucian construction of authority. In his famous statement on 19 September 1954, Ho Chi Minh revealed his Confucianist attitude regarding building the nation:

‘Các vua Hùng đã có công dựng nước, bác cháu ta phải cùng nhau giữ nước.’ Translated: ‘Many Hung kings had contributed to build our nation, you and I (Uncle) have to be together to keep our national independence.’ (Viet Cuong, 2014).

In his statement, Ho Chi Minh points out that the nation and each individual shared the same responsibilities at this period in Vietnamese history. He also sees himself as the 'Uncle' of the nation and of every Vietnamese family. This was a significant Confucianist character through many feudalist dynasties. This Confucian concept has been modified in the current social movement by a group of conservative political leaders arguing for monocultural traditional development and preventing pluralism in the visual arts in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in Vietnam (Le 2012–14, pers. comm., December 2012 to April 2014).

The concept of socialism is not rooted in any policy but is shaped by the traditional transition of a country (Dataray, 1965). In Vietnam, the new socialism placed special emphasis on the needs of small business, and the economy rapidly grew after the Doi Moi Policy was announced in 1986. The influences of the Western free-market system, based on the values of freedom and democracy, are also evident in many aspects of Vietnamese social development. The aims of the new Vietnamese society established after the Doi Moi Policy was introduced were the attainment of socialism through democratic enterprise. The government allowed some changes in leadership skills from the form of feudalist communism to democratic communism (Thayer, 1991, pp. 21–33; Le 2012–14, pers. comm., December 2012 to April 2014).

Development during the postwar period in Vietnam created dilemmas (Marr & White, 1988). People had to come to terms with the previous three decades of death, destruction and trauma. They faced serious food shortages, rampant inflation and administrative confusion; these traumatic experiences encompassed many interrelated factors that had significant impact (Marr & White, 1988, pp. 1, 3, & 231).

Statistics reveal that more than eight million Vietnamese people were killed or went missing during the wars (1954–75), and more than one million became refugees in other countries after the war. Trauma has played a formative role in the contemporary lives of many Vietnamese people. Ham (2007, p. 663) reveals that of Vietnamese troops (both North and South) more than two million died or were wounded, and three million suffered herbicide poisoning. Marr & White (1988, pp. 5–7) report that after the war, famine gripped the Vietnamese people, who were already struggling to survive and dealing with all the other aspects of the postwar decade; their experiences of traumatic events were to remain in their memories.

### **Defining psychological and cultural trauma in Vietnam**

A study of the literature on trauma helps to identify certain types of traumas experienced in Vietnam after the Vietnam War ended in 1975. In the book, *Traumas: explorations in memory* (1995), Cathy Caruth asserts that trauma victims remember moments of violence of which their consciousness was not able to perceive or grasp the full importance when it happened. Only later, after a period of latency, can those moments be remembered, worked through and spoken about. The traumatic memory reaches back to an act of violence that breaks out and reconstructs social connections. Trauma involves continually reliving the wounding experience in daydreams and nightmares and in compulsively seeking out similar circumstances. Our memory repeats to us what we have not yet come to terms with, what still haunts us (Caruth, 1995, p. 128-147).

The fact that a situation is ubiquitous does not absolve us from examining it.

On the contrary, we must examine it for the very reason that it can be the fate of each and every one of us. (Miller 1979, p. 197)

We do not notice a great deal of what we do not want to see. What is disturbing can be ignored until it becomes dangerous to continue to ignore it. Tal (1996) investigated what happens when a traumatic event forces someone to remember his or her disturbing past traumas. This is the disturbing reality of trauma in survivors who were treated as objects, without a face, name or place. The unfortunate truth is that the Vietnam War was the work of no person's imagination. It was, rather, a devastating reality—a series of war events that took place on both a physical and symbolic level (Tal, 1996, pp. 3–5).

The review of the literature on trauma is organised into two sections. The first section is about the psychology of trauma; the second is an analysis of literature that focuses on the processes of cultural trauma, processes that were reviewed in order to identify Vietnamese traumas after 1975. Although these two sections focus on the analysis of psychological trauma and cultural trauma, each section provides insights into the broader role of the visual arts in representing traumas.

#### *Definition of psychological trauma*

To understand the impact of trauma on Vietnamese culture one needs to understand the distinction between psychological trauma and cultural trauma. A feature of psychological trauma is its embeddedness or indelibility in the structure of someone's personality. Once lodged, it will not go away. In 1887, Charcot (cited in

Smelser, p.41) described traumatic memories as 'parasites of the mind'. Freud spoke of the traumatic memory as an 'an indelible imprint' and as producing 'permanent effects' (cited in Smelser, 2004, p. 41). Human memory is usually conceived as individually based, something that goes on 'inside the heads' of individual human beings. Freud (cited in Caruth, 1995a, pp. 7–8) also described trauma as the successive movement from an event to its repression and then to its return. He also believed that the trauma occurs only after a period of latency.

According to Caruth (1995a, p. 4) the effects of the traumatic event are delayed because 'what returns to haunt the victim ... is not only the reality of violent events but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known'. Caruth points out that a rethinking of traumatic events is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our limited understanding; she hopes scholars from different fields, such as psychoanalysis, sociology and literature, begin to listen to each other in the study of trauma so that they will come to understand the diverse aspects of traumatic experience.

In *Traumatizing theory*, Ball (2007) elaborates on the differences between some aspects of trauma revealed through a variety of research studies (Caruth, LaCapra, Ley & Ball cited in Ball, 2007); Caruth is interested in the experiences of epistemological disjuncture signalled by the literality of traumatic memories. In contrast, Dominick LaCapra's respect for historical actuality does not hinge on a notion of 'pure' memory, which, by definition, has not been distorted or informed by any interpretative perspective (cited in Ball, 2007, p. xxxiii). LaCapra states that memories and interpretations are mediated by ethical, national, disciplinary and transference identifications that should be acknowledged in any genuinely critical reflection about the past. Ball also points out that between Ruth Leys and Caruth regarding the trauma model and its differences. Leys sees Caruth's understanding of trauma—in which the traumatic nightmare is defined as an 'unclaimed experience' or 'infectious disease' in an 'incubation period'—as a literal, non-symbolic and nonrepresentational memory of the traumatic event (as cited in Ball, 2007, p. xxxiii).

Leys argues that Caruth's concept of trauma implies that the traumatic event tends to construct the traumatic symptom as an external 'foreign body' rather than acknowledging the ways in which trauma may be internal and, indeed, constitutive of subjectivity (as cited in Ball, 2007, p. xxxiii).



Eyerman (2004b) found that collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating process. Ideologies create substantiating archives of images; representative images that encapsulate common ideas of significance and trigger predictable thoughts and feelings. He also discovered that collective memory through time and across place is recorded within a narrative frame. As he notes:

a narrative can travel as an individual can travel. It can be written down, painted, responded to, communicated and received in distant places by isolated individuals who can then, through them, be remembered and reunited with collectivity. (pp. 161–2)

Eyerman's (2004b) research shows that collective memory is linked to collective identity and, as such, can be closely linked to ideology.

### *The structure of psychological trauma*

Smelser (2004, pp. 31–5) defines the structure of psychological trauma through the conception of a system in which 'precipitating events' are identified first as playing a role, and then this becomes part of a 'process-in-system', which causes the formation of trauma. The trauma process affects the victim over time, through diverse external and internal causes. For example, a primary traumatising event, with its concurrent causes including the general health of the victim and precipitating events, plays out in the context of a continuing struggle between an unconscious feeling and a defensive emotion. Smelser states that trauma and its status are negotiated processes. The roles of affect, cognition and memory in traumas and the roles of defending against, coping with, and working through traumas as demonstrated in Smelser's system define the structure of psychological trauma. The following section reviews the broader role of trauma and its effect on culture.

### *Definition of cultural trauma*

Collective cultural trauma differs greatly from psychological trauma in terms of the mechanisms that establish and sustain it. The mechanisms associated with psychological trauma are the intrapsychic dynamics of defence, adaptation, coping and working through; the mechanisms at the collective cultural level are mainly those of social agents and contending groups. Collective cultural trauma refers to the harm done to the basic tissue of social life, harm that damages the bonds essential to the prevailing sense of communality. Collective cultural trauma works its

way slowly into the awareness of those who have suffered from it. In contrast, individual psychological trauma involves a quality of suddenness normally associated with traumatic shock, such as the condition known as 'shell shock' that affected so many soldiers during World War II (Alexander, 2004, p. 4; Smelser, 2004, pp. 38–9).

Alexander (2004) argues that cultural trauma is for the most part historically made, not just born of the moment. Cultural trauma can be a symptom of mass population depletion, war or genocide. This fundamental point leads us to the issue of the mechanisms and agencies involved in the process of the creation of trauma. The Great Depression of the 1930s can be regarded as a cultural trauma. The Great Depression was the result of the weakness of economic institutions and it led to pressure on, and even the breakdown of, political and legal systems. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by the groups of people involved (Alexander, 2004, p. 6). Alexander (2004) argues that 'trauma is not something naturally existing; it is something constructed by society' (p.1). In fact, he goes on to say, 'the scholarly approaches to trauma developed thus far would have been distorted by the powerful, common-sense understandings of trauma that have emerged in everyday life' (p.). He defines an essential characteristic of cultural trauma as being the damage it causes to social structures, which can be seen at the cultural level (p. 2).

### *The theory of cultural trauma*

Alexander's theory of cultural trauma, which he presents as 'a trauma process', can be used to identify the causes of trauma. His theory also provides an explanation of how victims of trauma suffer and how this affects others (Alexander, 2004, p. 11). Vietnamese cultural trauma was first recognised as a trauma symptom in 1985 when the Sixth National Party Congress held in 1986 acknowledged the seriousness of the Vietnamese nation's situation and its position. Both Vo (1990) and Alexander (2004) have noted how communities can take responsibility for human suffering:

It is by constructing cultural traumas that social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering but 'take on board' some significant responsibility for it. (Alexander, 2004, p. 1)

Alexander's theory describes 10 elements—identified in bold below and illustrated by example—which can be applied to identify the cause of Vietnamese cultural trauma.

**The cultural construction of trauma begins with a claim-making broadcast** (Element 1). In Vietnam, claim-making broadcasts announcing the embargo period caused national problems in terms of social, economic and political development after the war in 1975. According to Alexander's framework, **carrier groups** (Element 2) are the collective agents of the trauma or of the problematic process representing a perspective and specific interest. Since 1985, in Vietnam the Gang of Five artists, whose works and styles differed greatly from each other's, held a number of exhibitions that represented the issues announced by the government. **Speech acts** (Element 3) have two parts—audience and speaker—who are both involved in the same public reaction. In Vietnam at this time, the Gang of Five artists 'spoke' to their audience in Hanoi when the Doi Moi Policy was established (see Appendix 1). Element 4 is **culture and classification**; Alexander's framework includes four aspects which reflect the nature of the pain of the victim. As reported by Marr & White (1988, pp. 3–4), the postwar Vietnamese nation's budget was under great stress due to the embargo period (p. 11), which caused dilemmas for the state and for the Vietnamese people. In addition, people were suffering from the loss of family members. **The institutional arena** (Element 5) in Alexander's framework shows how to analyse the representational process, creating a master narrative of social suffering representing social issues and social commentaries. In Vietnam, the Gang of Five artists established and exhibited their artworks widely in North Vietnam. They represented national and personal subject matters, using differing individual art styles. These 'speech acts' including audience and speaker represented the people's voice powerfully to the government (Phan, 2012). Alexander also suggests in his theory of the process of trauma that **religions and legally binding responsibilities** (Element 6) can modify the trauma in different directions. In this respect, Tam Giao, especially Buddhism, was practised widely in Vietnam, and it contributed considerably to the provision of peace and calm to those who, having survived the war, confronted postwar economic dilemmas. Buddhist theories became the best way to provide hope and spiritual support for those with mental disorders. The Buddha taught that through an understanding for each other and through the practice of meditation, peace of mind could be achieved. The Buddhist religion teaches that when people cultivate their inner peace they will survive. This teaching

assists people who need mental health support. The Buddha said that if the mind is calmed, action becomes spontaneous and natural (Fisher, 2002, p. 95). Indeed, Buddhist strategies are taught to help people gain confidence and to heal victims of trauma.

The government accepted responsibility for the failures caused by the embargo and made the decision to implement a new policy—namely, the Doi Moi Policy of 1986. According to **the scientific process of defining a historical event** (Element 7) described by Alexander, collective trauma is affirmed only when the cultural classification is demonstrated by a number of scholars who, using scholarly research methods, define a historical event as traumatic. With regard to postwar trauma in Vietnam, Marr acknowledges the contribution of five scholars from Vietnam, two from Eastern Europe and one from Sweden, who contributed to the study of Vietnamese traumas after 1975 (Marr & White, 1988, p. 7).

The role of the **mass media** (Element 8) is sometimes exaggerated, and there is a distortion of the ‘news’ in mass-circulation newspapers and magazines. Indeed, the Vietnamese society was firmly controlled by the Communist Party; newspapers and the mass media exacerbated the situation by criticising the social and national embargo that caused enormous traumas for the nation.

The **state bureaucracy** (Element 9) identifies the country’s trauma and critically analyses the problems. The government criticised the embargo period in Vietnam, which created much trauma for the country during the 10 years after 1975. The cultural traumas reflected in a society are shown in the process of **identity, revision, memory and routinisation** (Element 10). This process is a remembering of the collective past and is deeply connected to the contemporary sense of the self. Alexander (2004, pp. 11–19) states that the collective identity that has been reconstructed will eventually emerge as a period of ‘calming down’. An example of the national trauma in Vietnam during this period can be found in Dang Xuan Hoa’s artworks. He represents the pain of the country by using everyday subjects in his artworks, including his own family members as figures, to represent the cultural trauma experienced by the Vietnamese.

The 10 elements from Alexander’s framework each play a role in the social construction and deconstruction of a traumatic event and help to identify the Vietnamese cultural trauma process. Alexander’s theory presents a framework for

how to identify 'a trauma process', which is not merely technical or scientific. Alexander's theory is relevant to all societies because collective traumas do not have geographical or cultural boundaries. Sztompka (2004) identifies a structure for the process of trauma that brings about changes in a society. The following section considers the two parts to identifying 'a trauma process'—that is, traumatogenic social changes and the traumatic sequence (Sztompka, 2004, pp. 158–69).

#### *Structure of a trauma process causing social changes*

A trauma process causes change in a society through traumatogenic aspects. The term *traumatogenic* refers to some types of changes in certain societies that bring about traumas. Sztompka (2004, pp. 158–69) describes this process as 'traumatogenic social change'. He identifies this symptom through four aspects. First, social change (e.g. a revolution) causes traumas when it produces change suddenly and rapidly, relative to historical time. Second, a traumatogenic change involves not only politics but also the law, the economy, morality, culture, art and sometimes even language. Third, traumatogenic change is evident in the core aspects of social life or personal destiny whether public or private—for example, in the transfer of power or when there is a shift in dominant values. The fourth and last feature of traumatogenic change concerns uncomfortable experiences that the individual's mental framework can no longer accept.

#### *Trauma sequence*

Sztompka (2004, pp. 168–9) explains that the symptoms of traumatogenic change are a process, a dynamic sequence of six typical stages:

1. traumatogenic change (sudden, comprehensive, deep and unexpected)
2. disorganisation of culture and accompanying cultural disorientation of actors (*structural conduciveness* is the term Smelser (2004) uses in his theory for analogous phenomena)
3. traumatising situations or events appearing as a result of traumatogenic change in areas other than culture and affecting the life-world of the people (*structural strain* and *precipitating events* in Smelser's terminology)

4. traumatic condition expressed by a set of traumatic symptoms, mental or behavioural (new shared ways of conduct or *generalised beliefs* (2004)
5. Post-traumatic adaptations employing various strategies of coping with trauma (*social control* in Smelser's theory)
6. overcoming trauma by consolidation of a new cultural complex (the closing phase of the sequence).

Sztompka (2004, p. 169) explains that the sequence of traumas concerns the broad process of dealing with trauma. The process comprises three important aspects. The first is a matter of the wider world, whereby globalising influences may have an impact upon a community or society—for example, market fluctuations, military conflicts and the policies of superpowers. The second aspect relates to traumatogenic change in the law, in the economy and in everyday life. The third aspect is the inevitable process of cultural legacies and traditions clashing with new cultural transformations imposed on the new generation. He also emphasises that this third aspect of the process occurs parallel with the traumatic sequence, which is helpful at the stage of overcoming trauma.

Alexander's framework (2004) provides a scientific system of how to recognise cultural trauma, which differs from the psychological trauma theories of Caruth (1995a), Ball (2007) and Eyerman (2004b). Other scholars have found that victims speak out about their issues through the visual arts during their silent times or during their nightmare periods. Conn (2002) points out that the narratives of trauma and of civil war in paintings throughout art history are horrifying. Ferrari (1988) analyses the visual arts as an effective psychological tool for expression, and as an escape from traumas. Fox (2006) explores how the contexts of war were reflected in artworks after World War I, showing many types of traumas.

Artworks often depict traumatogenic change after war. Psychological traumas and cultural traumas are manifest in the Vietnamese visual arts using Eastern aesthetic systems that differ from those of Western art. Across different cultures, it is possible to see individual methods of expression that reflect how the self or the community is portrayed.

### **The visual arts and the expression of trauma**

#### *Collective memory and production*

With regard to collective memory and identity in relation to the visual arts, Freud and Arnhem (cited in Ferrari, 1988) and Fox (2006) state that thinking in representations is close to the unconscious process, which is, in turn, relatable to how Caruth (1995) interprets psychological trauma, discussed earlier in this chapter. Artists participate in debates about the memory and meaning of particular events. They then produce artworks that not only perform 'artistic miracles' (Ferrari, 1988, p. 91) but also reflect their memory; in so doing, they transform the representation of space in art (Fox, 2006, p. 247). We can see this process at work in the artworks of British artist Henry Moore, who depicted human suffering during World War II. Moore's sketches recorded events in London in the 1940s. An early reviewer in *The Penguin new writing* noted in 1943 that 'these motionless swatted figures belong to no accidental setting of time and place' (cited in Stonebridge, 2007, p. 87). In the *Shelter* drawings, curious shapes in pinks, yellows, greys and greens are anticipated and repeated to remind the viewer of other war artists (Stonebridge, 2000, p. 87).

Moore's anxiety about the war was depicted by vast empty spaces in his artworks. *Crowd looking at a tied-up object* (1942) was produced during a lull between two large-scale bomb attacks on London. In Moore's *Tied-up object* (see Appendix 9) there is 'blank space', something that can only be imagined, such as a bus that does not arrive or a war that never ends. A tied-up object is like a traumatic object; it signifies but does not represent or reveal anything (Stonebridge, 2000, p. 88). Stonebridge explains the traumas of World War II in this way:

Another work by Moore is *Girl Reading to a Woman Holding a Child*, 1946 which speaks to the postwar period of reconstruction and national renewal. Moore uses curtains to frame the window which could also be bordering a picture, bringing the outside, the surreal landscape, the anxiety object, and the worried woman closer to the inside. The reader in his work does not attend to her book but stares into the distance, the mother looks toward the scene outside Moore's drawing, while the infant hangs onto her mother's breast and is troubled by something that has caught its eyes from the opposite direction ... Moore's artwork showed a fitting memorial to the anxiety of World War II. (pp. 96–7)

Collective memory is further discussed in Julia Dickson-Gomez's research in terms of community conflict and the causes of traumas in Germany. She found that traumatic symptoms could be transmitted to children who had not directly experienced trauma. According to Dickson-Gomez (2002), collective violence

changes the perpetrators, the victims and the society in which it occurs. For example, Marianne Hirsch coined the expression 'post-memory' about the Holocaust (Dickson-Gomez, 2002, p. 416).

Sometimes the community can be traumatised in much the same way as the human mind and body are traumatised through cultural violence and cultural fear. These aspects are represented by images in jars in the installation *World in a jar: war and trauma* by Robert Hirsch (2009). The installation consists of more than 1,000 individual images in jars, stacked four high on a 1.5 m x 1 m x 0.6 m serpentine display pedestal and surrounded by 10 individually framed 1m x 1.5 m prints. The images in the jars are seen from multiple points of view. He uses images to anchor particular events, which allow the images to transcend their specific time based on circumstances, such as the *Atomic bomb*, *The black-and-white post holocaust world*. In answering the question, 'Where does this artwork come from?', Hirsch said, 'I contemplate issues of reality, originality, and reproduction'. Hirsch was not a victim of war trauma, but he did acknowledge that 'the complex web of cultural inheritance and [its] values' can produce 'a wounded spirit' (Hirsch, 2009, p. 298) and these can affect the next generation. The artwork reflects what he observes and absorbs from the issues of reality. This is supported by Fox (2006, p. 2), who stated, 'Psychological trauma is today defined as an emotionally harmful event'.

#### *Aesthetic systems and the representation of trauma*

This section discusses the way in which aesthetic systems determine how artists represent artworks and considers the roles of seeing and perception in aesthetic expression in creating different culturally-specific ways of expressing trauma in the visual arts.

Visual arts production is an activity that results in many forms, including those of popular entertainment, such as movies and television series, pop concerts and radio broadcasts. Korsmeyer (1998) suggests some people believe the visual arts are too varied and dissimilar a phenomenon to succumb to any single definition at all and argues against the idea that there is a common creative purpose that produces artefacts in all societies. After surveying aesthetic systems in 10 largely independent and highly diverse societies, Korsmeyer defines art as having 'culturally significant meaning, skillfully encoded in an affecting, sensuous medium' (p. 29). She also asserts that art traditions and individual artworks vary in the emphasis placed upon



each of these qualities; however, one artwork or art form is rarely able to have all of these qualities. Korsmeyer also explores how the aesthetic attitude we take determines how we perceive the world and guides our attention to those directions that are relevant to our purposes. She theorises that to have an attitude is to be favourably or unfavourably orientated (pp. 1–3, 29, 30 & 78). When an audience wants to understand an artwork it needs to seek the specific codes, and once understood, these codes ensure the audience will not feel lost when engaging with that work of art. The masterworks of Impressionist and modernist artists created during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the West demonstrated formalism in Western art techniques and principles. Most works by the Old Masters were achieved by using colours, shapes and tones to imitate how the world appears in three dimensions. This representation of the world differs from the Japanese tradition, for example, where complex brush techniques of layers, dots and lines are used to achieve their pictorial purposes. This aesthetic difference can be seen by comparing two artists who represent the same trauma context: the Russian artist Aivazovsky with his 1850 artwork *The ninth wave* (see Appendix 9) and the Japanese artist Hokusai with his artwork *The great wave off Kanagawa*, produced in 1829–32 (see Appendix 10). The two artists use different materials and aesthetic canons to create quite different visual expressions to portray deathly waves and trauma.

Using the framework of a Western aesthetic would not be a satisfactory approach to understand the traditional art of Asia because Asian art cannot be fully appreciated except in relation to the culture in which it plays an important part. Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* in the Sistine Chapel would confuse someone who knew nothing of Christianity or of the Western humanistic tradition. If one believes that the conventional Western linear perspective is the only way of seeing and representing, he or she would perceive Asian traditional art as 'merely' using some of the techniques used for calligraphic brushwork and for tracing ink (Fong, 2003, pp. 258–60).

The traditional Vietnamese aesthetic is different from Western formalism, which is one of the principal art theories of the West. Sullivan (1967) points out that these two aesthetic canons are completely different in their perspectives, in terms of both creating and appreciating artworks, even though the artworks may be depicting the same subject matter. Sullivan suggests that in order to understand the art of the East, one should not rely on the Western aesthetic canon to appreciate it (p. 9).

Trauma is thus represented differently in different cultures and through different aesthetic means. Trauma expressed through the artwork of Vietnamese artists uses a language that is specific to the Vietnamese perspective, a language that is specific to the Vietnamese perspective, a language of symbolism inherent to the Tam Giao culture.

### *Symbolic meanings and representation*

An understanding of how and why metaphor is deployed can be used to interpret art periods as well as individual artworks. Construction of metaphoric meaning begins by viewing the work as a whole, becoming aware of the visual attributes and nuances and then finding out the latent subject matter of the work as portrayed by the artist (Feinstein, 1985, p. 28). The meaning attached to a symbol changes over time and therefore must be understood in context (Feinstein, 1985, p. 27). A symbol does not necessarily hold the same meaning for everyone; opposite and contradictory meanings can be derived from the same symbol, which may be used for different purposes and for different audiences. For example, a fairy can mean a beauty or a hero, but for some a fairy could represent evil depending on the viewer's subjectivity, which acts as a filter, highlighting particular interpretations.

In order to understand metaphorical expression in contemporary Vietnamese artworks, it is necessary to consider the traditional symbolic meanings and ways of expression in two major systems of symbolism. Artists observed the approach of Buddhist teachings to human emotional blocks and how it encouraged freedom from the limitations of self. Artists became immersed in this system of thought and then used its symbols to express their opinions and feelings in their artworks. The second set of symbolic images belongs to Taoism. The historical unfolding of Taoist thought as it combined with polytheism and Buddhism resulted in symbolic images that involved the folkloric construction of meanings. These are derived from real stories that were modified imaginatively in relation to the power of the polytheist thought and the artist's own experiences. The seventeenth-century Vietnamese relief sculpture *Dancing fairies* (see Chapter 2) shows how Vietnamese traditional art uses Taoist symbols. This historic system of symbolic images is still found in contemporary art today. In addition, the French colonial style of artistic expression introduced another set of classical metaphors and symbols working within a system of pictorial realism that continued after the end of colonial rule in 1954.

In traditional artworks, Vietnamese artists use layers to compose their work, arranging their subject matter in the following way. Images representing the main subject or idea under discussion are always bigger than the less-important ideas and are placed in the centre of the artwork. Smaller images are presented in sequential layers to explain the content. This method is very different from the perspective methods used in Western traditional art.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Tam Giao culture defines Vietnamese ethics. The long Vietnamese tradition of Tam Giao forms the basis of Vietnamese culture and establishes its conceptual system. This system thus plays a central role in defining societal development. Tam Giao cultural elements have influenced the ways in which the Vietnamese represent themselves pictorially.

## **Contextual Background**

### **A review of the social, political and visual arts in Vietnam from 1954 to 2014 in the context of war traumas**

This section presents a systematic overview of political, economic and traditional reforms in Vietnam reflected in artists' memories about wars as demonstrated in their art practice. Between 1954 and 1975, both North and South Vietnam used terror and lies to sustain the power of their one-party dictatorships. While Uncle Ho remained popular in the North, Ngo Dinh Diem 'fathered' a series of tragic policies (Ham, 2007, p. 56). The visual arts in North Vietnam (1954–75) consisted of mass media channelling practical communist purposes and outcomes rather than of personal expression. The police and the Communist Party strictly controlled artworks and exhibitions. In South Vietnam the government neither controlled nor supported the visual arts; therefore, artists worked as individuals (Trinh, 2009b, p. 3). In both the North and South, artworks showed colonial art influences.

To review the visual arts in the context of war trauma during this period (1954–75) requires an explanatory model of how traumas affect individuals. Caruth (1995a; 1996) explains that in the psychoanalytic theory of trauma it is not the experience itself that produces traumatic effects but rather the remembrance of it. In her account, there is always a time lapse between an event and the experience of

trauma, a period of latency in which forgetting is characteristic. As a reflective–retrospective process, trauma links the past to the present through representations and imagining. The artwork *Bird and fruit*, 1982 by Buu Chi, using oil painting on canvas (see Figure 1), represents this process with the significant events during the period between 1954 and 1975 depicted based on the artist's memories.

Buu Chi is an artist who uses a colonial-derived art style to depict his feelings of isolation and his fear of emptiness. The repetitive use of square and rectangular shapes (influenced by Cezanne's colours) expresses his moods. A dove stands alone on a 'colonial chair', looking down at a table with some scattered fruit. The dove is a symbol of peace and unity, but in this artwork it also represents isolation. Buu Chi portrays a national social issue, reflecting on the political context using the language of colonial art. He uses *Bird and fruit* to represent his own traumatic experience.

In the 10 years between 1975 and 1985 after the end of the Vietnam War, the nation faced economic problems followed by the cultural changes. Everyone had to try to survive as individuals. Despite these difficult conditions, artists continued to urge freedom of thought. Many artists tried to make changes or leave the monolithic communist political atmosphere but were caught on the horns of an economic dilemma. Under a single national government, the visual arts in Vietnam at this time were divided into two main streams: 'art for art's sake' and 'commercial art' (Trinh, 2009a, p. 5). Artists in the former stream refused government control and were not affected by the 1986 Doi Moi Policy (see Appendix 8). Such artists held attitudes similar to those of the senior artists of the 1945–75 era in Vietnam. They recognised the urgent need to develop artistic expressions and the need for freedom to develop their creativity. This 'art for art's sake' stream is best represented by the five artists referred to as *Be Lu Nam Ten* (Gang of Five), which included Dang Xuan Hoa, Tran Luong and Ha Chi Hieu in Hanoi, and by the group of 10 abstract artists in Ho Chi Minh City. During this period, the second stream, the commercial artists, who had lived and worked during the civil war and who previously had received nothing, now wanted to sell their artworks whenever an opportunity arose. These artists tried hard to become wealthy and were willing to serve foreigners' aesthetic wishes in order to do so. The commercial art stream led to alienation in the Vietnamese contemporary art scene. The communist government was still very much in control of artists but took no responsibility for visual arts development. After 1975, younger artists

attempted a new art form in which they could show their ideas about the 'anti-social politics' and express their personal emotions (Trinh, 2009a, p. 3).



**Figure 1: Buu Chi, 1982, painting, *Bird and fruit*, oil on canvas, 90 x 120 cm**

Source: Tran, Huu, & Vu, 1987, p. 151

Marr and White (1988), along with five other Vietnamese scholars—Lam Thanh Liem, Nguyen Duc Nhuan, Nguyen Huu Dong, Ngo Vinh Long and Vo Nhan Tri—have researched in detail the social development of Vietnam in the postwar period:

Vietnam faces daunting obstacles to development. Some clearly link to war time destruction and dependency on foreign aid (both south and north of the seventeenth parallel). Others relate more to ideological assumptions. Still others are the product of structural limitations only partly appreciated by those in power, although a constant preoccupation for the other 65 million Vietnamese who must somehow make their way within the system. (Marr & White, 1988, p. 11)

Indeed, the first 10 years after the war were tough for the Vietnamese people. As one Central Committee member told a Western correspondent, 'Now nothing more can happen. The problems we have to face now are trifles compared to those of the past' (cited in Marr & White, 1988, p. 1). Two artworks by the leader of the Gang of Five artists, Dang Xuan Hoa, produced as part of a series of nine paintings in 2007—

08, reflect the artist's memories of himself and his family living through the decade 1975–85 (see Figures 2a and 2b).



**Figure 2a: Dang Xuan Hoa, 2007–08, painting, *A circle of life* series (work 1), oil on canvas, exhibited Art Asia, 2009**

Source: Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December



**Figure 2b: Dang Xuan Hoa, folk art, *Wrestling*, ink on Dzo paper**

Source: Hoang, 1995, p. 41

The atmosphere in the painting (see Figure 2a) portrays the social destruction after 1975. In the centre of the artwork are two symbols that borrow from ancient art in Vietnam—a royal carriage and folk art wrestling figures (see Figure 2b).

The traditional royal carriage symbolises the omnipotent system, and depicted in an unstable condition it represents the decline in the power of the Confucian government as it heads into difficulty. Dang also uses figures of his family (he has a wife and two children) in both paintings and portrays them figuratively, looking confused and upset. His use of symbols in his artworks conveys his feelings of trauma—Confucian motifs in decay—and symbolically describes a chaotic

traditional culture. These works are reminiscences of the traumatic events between 1975 and 1985 in Vietnam (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December).



**Figure 3: Dang Xuan Hoa, 2007, painting, *A circle of life* series (work 2), oil on canvas, exhibited Art Asia, 2009**

Source: Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December

The artwork *A circle of life* series (work 2) represents how the Vietnamese people experienced the social changes brought about by economic hardship (see Figure 3). In the centre of the artwork is a wrestling couple. This traditional Vietnamese folk art symbol is juxtaposed with a group of figures (the artist's family members) all looking at the viewer. With this work, the artist is representing the collapse or destruction of during the period 1975–85 and the gloomy atmosphere of each and every family in Vietnam. Dang Xuan Hoa stated in interview that he wanted to portray the cultural changes in society. He said he was not expecting the globalised culture of that period to subsume Vietnamese traditions: 'We lost some significant things; however, over here [Vietnam] there is an ongoing positive movement' (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December). The three artworks show his personal account of collective suffering. The cultural traumas reflected in Dang Xuan Hoa's artwork was caused by the embargo of the first 10-year period. Everyone was stressed and evidently anxious about their future. In his artworks, he represents a symptom of the war traumas in his community.

While the two artworks by Dang Xuan Hoa show Vietnamese tradition in a period of confusion, *Green team* by Nguyen Manh Hung expresses Nguyen's opinions of the Vietnamese economic problems during that decade.





**Figure 4: Nguyen Manh Hung, 2009, *Green team*, oil on canvas, 100 x 200 cm**

Source: Bui & Pham, 2012, p. 100

Nguyen Manh Hung represents Vietnamese economic suffering through a series of artworks using images of fighter jets carrying agricultural products in nylon bags. He shows the rapid, chaotic modernisation of Vietnam during the Doi Moi period. In this series, which was produced between 2000 and 2009, he uses his sense of humour in representing his memory of Vietnamese economic problems. In these works, the traumas are portrayed in the form of implicit commentaries on the imbalance between Vietnamese traditional agricultural life and industrial development in Vietnam at the beginning of the Doi Moi period (Bui & Pham, 2012, pp. 96–101). By using humour and by juxtaposing the nylon bags (new items in Vietnam at that time) and the planes flying over farms, he creates an ironic image of an agricultural nation experiencing the rapid change of global impact. The Confucian expression deep within Vietnamese customs was therefore represented ironically through his artworks.

According to Trinh (2009b), between 1985 and 1995, artists applauded the Doi Moi Policy and quickly identified themselves with a revolt led by a new executive group in the Visual Arts Association, which included Nguyen Quan, Luong Xuan Doan and Dang Thi Khue. During 1986–95 many young artists took up the opportunity to look at postmodernism and to examine how to use the principles of contemporary art forms for themselves. However, the conservatives in the Visual Arts Association tried to hinder this new development and again took power to control the visual arts in Vietnam. As Trinh (2009b) points out, the modernist artists felt the shame of defeat and opposed the conservative group's negative attitudes about the development of the visual arts.



Susan Boyd (1997) discusses how Vietnamese artists learnt and absorbed the new perspectives in the visual arts by co- exhibitions. Artists worked in the same studios, participating in programs as artists in residence. Foreign artists were permitted to work and exhibit their artworks in Vietnam, and migrant Vietnamese artists who lived in other countries could also exhibit their art in Vietnam. These artists also explored the changes in Vietnam at the time but expressed these issues in their artworks from an outsider's point of view. For example, Debra Porch, an Australian artist resident in Vietnam in 1997, uses Vietnamese subject matter in her artwork. In her work *Secret = stories* (see Appendix 11), she depicts issues related to Vietnamese mortality, using a Vietnamese traditional hairstyle and boxes as symbols of death, coffins and funereal emotions. Donal Fitzgerald, with his artwork *Good intentions* (see Appendix 11), reminds the Vietnamese people of the postwar period and visually represents his sympathy for the Vietnamese people at that time. The directness of these new creative processes confronted the subtlety of the Tam Giao. The expression of subject matter originating from Western philosophical ideas interested and influenced young Vietnamese artists. In this period, artists began to use diverse art forms to express themselves and depict their social issues, discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

In the period 1995 to 2005, international contemporary art was diverse in its movements but with three closely related currents. According to Smith (2011), the first current was an exploration of different styles, practices and media in artwork; the second was a revolution in art ideology and a concern with issues around national identity and rights; and the third was the use of strategies in art that were more diverse within Vietnam due to the impact of global influences (pp. 10–12). Vietnamese artists rethinking their art were part of this international flow of ideas. Taylor (2007) reinforces the view that pluralism—in the form of postmodern perspectives and their role in social commentaries—represents Vietnamese cultural diversity in the twenty-first century.

In Vietnam, contemporary art is no longer of one kind, controlled by the government, nor does it only possess traditional values of past periods. Vietnamese art is currently multivalent. Since 2005, the visual arts in Vietnam have reflected a greater complexity than ever before. There are three different currents of art practice evident. The first relates to the art academy, which continues to maintain conservative attitudes and the communist predilection for art for specific

propaganda purposes. This group's pictorial ideology and practice draws from colonial art and 'communist' realism. However, they now also give consideration to a diversity in styles, selected from global art and from the public's new aesthetic tastes. This group has adopted the art terminology of other cultures (Le, 2006, pp. 5–6; Ta, 2006, p. 33). The second current represents the Doi Moi artists who want to develop traditional Tam Giao culture within an exploration of some new methods in their artworks. This group, which remains committed to exploring a combination of modern avant-garde art and traditional art, is discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. This current also involves a number of Vietnamese emigrant artists who have returned to Vietnam to work and exhibit together with foreign artists-in-residence (Bui & Pham, 2012, pp. 12–15). However, these artists-in-residence and emigrant artists are not a significant cause of change to the economic and cultural reforms in Vietnam. The third current is a group of Vietnamese artists who have totally rejected the art academy in all senses. This group of artists uses an innovative method for absorbing international art through travel, focusing on museums and galleries and examining art criticism at the international level. These artists demonstrate an eclectic expression of art. This third current is developing quite separately from the other two because it has two distinct aspects to its involvement with global cultures: the first is the absorption of capitalist social ideology, and the second is the use of information and practice through innovative opportunities (Kraevskaia, 2008, pp. 103–10).

## **Conclusion**

This contextual background has provided a brief review of how the visual arts reflect the social and political movements that caused the cultural changes in Vietnam from 1954 to 2014. Between 1954 and 1985, the visual arts developed in the Vietnamese communist regime in the North under French cultural influence; however, in the South, artists were self-taught, and without government control until 1975. After the Doi Moi Policy was announced, the visual arts clearly demonstrated the changes in postwar culture after the new government outlook (Nguyen, 2010, pp. 108–14). From 1985 to 1995, the Doi Moi groups of artists depicted Vietnamese social and political change. Between 1995 and 2005, post-Doi Moi artists depicted postwar society, reflecting their cultural transformation. In the period between 2005 and 2014, a third current of art systematically incorporated global cultures into the visual cultural development of Vietnam. Artists continue to use Vietnamese visual symbols

and metaphors to record their experiences of war traumas, and this will be presented in the following chapter.

# **Chapter 1:**

## **Research Methodology**

### **Rationale**

There were three reasons to conduct this research. First, to inform a Western audience who wishes to understand war traumas in the context of Tam Giao culture and society. Second, to explore how Vietnam's postwar traumas have been represented in Vietnamese contemporary art. Third, the symptoms of cultural trauma continue to be reflected in the art of the post-Doi Moi period, which has been heavily influenced by globalised art practices, and the objective, therefore, was to examine changes in the Vietnamese Tam Giao culture, which has been forced to adapt to a new society. To investigate these points, a qualitative methodological approach was adopted, using narrative and ethnographic methods.

### **Introduction**

I have been embedded within Tam Giao culture as a member of a family that for centuries prior to the communist administration had contributed to various Vietnamese Confucian governments. This background not only sustained my interests but also framed the final interpretations of the interview data. The data itself was gathered using methods that were as far as possible ethnographically neutral and eschewed Tam Giao values.

### **Thesis Question**

For this research, I used qualitative narrative research materials and ethnographic methods to analyse Vietnamese postwar traumas after 1985, with reference to the following research question.

**What is the role of Tam Giao culture in the visual representation of Vietnamese postwar traumas between 1985 and 2014?**

Narrative research was used to establish the sources and methods of visual representation of Vietnamese postwar traumas with reference to the following three

aims: (1) to identify Tam Giao elements and their development in order to understand Vietnamese customs shown in the visual arts throughout history; (2) to identify the sequence of cultural traumas in the contemporary world in order to apply it to an investigation of this symptom in Vietnam after 1985; (3) to analyse accounts of the sample participants' subjective experiences within visual arts contexts.

My systematic examination of the narrative materials was applied to my fieldwork research to investigate the ethnography of Vietnamese postwar traumas in contemporary art. To develop this research, a documentary was made using interviewing methods related to the narrative material.

Qualitative analytical research methods provided flexibility for me to examine the thesis question. This research had two objectives:

1. to research how Tam Giao has been used in the visual arts representation of postwar traumas in Vietnam since 1985
2. to explore how Vietnamese artists have used Tam Giao cultural elements (Buddhist, Taoist and Confucianist) to represent themselves, their experiences of postwar traumas and their concerns about social conflicts between 1985 and 2014.

## **Narrative Research**

The first objective engaged narrative research, where the goal was to understand how Vietnamese society has changed since the Doi Moi policies were initiated in 1986, following the cultural and philosophical transformation of the postwar period. This narrative research was divided into three phases. The first phase involved an examination of how Tam Giao has changed throughout history, resulting in the creation of new forms of visual arts expression in each period. Scholars (discussed below) have found that the cultural changes in each period were the result of adaptations to new phenomena. The second phase involved the application of the 10 elements of Alexander's (2004) theory of cultural trauma to identify and examine the symptoms of Vietnamese cultural traumas. This is presented in Chapter 1. In this phase, the research uncovered evidence through artworks (that remain today) and through narrative materials about the way in which these symptoms are represented in the Vietnamese visual arts, presented in Chapter 2. The third phase

involved a visit to Vietnam for fieldwork to examine narrative materials by testing the research instruments on site. The fieldwork was conducted in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, the two centres of Vietnamese cultural development. The evidence and materials collected during the fieldwork demonstrate how society and culture were changing in the period when the Vietnamese people began to overcome their cultural traumas after 1985, which is in turn reflected in the artworks of artists in both North and South Vietnam (see Appendix 2 for the names of the art participants and the interview dates).

## **Phase 1**

The first phase of this narrative research focused on the use of Tam Giao elements in different times in history and how they were in turn reflected in representations of war trauma in the visual arts context. The research was organised as follows: a brief review of the literature; a description of the Tam Giao elements used to construct this narrative description; an introduction of selected artworks, including details of the Tam Giao elements that expressed the war trauma context; and, finally, an examination of the intersections of narrative materials using participants' experiences regarding the evidence and notions of truth.

Tam Giao elements have been absorbed and represented in the customs of each dynasty in Vietnamese history. The research conducted by historians and critics Nguyen and Le (2012), Irons (2008) and Fisher (2002), and by an art critic Phan (1977b), Fisher (2002), Marr and White (1988), Kastfelt (2005) and Woodside (1989) was drawn upon to frame an analysis of how Tam Giao elements have been practised and represented in Vietnamese customs. These materials provided direction for the investigation of different culturally specific aspects, such as why people in each period emphasised a particular Tam Giao element for their social development. These scholars and critics also found that political and social development are interrelated and have led to changes in the way Tam Giao elements have been represented in the visual arts. Appendix 1 provides more details of this section, such as details of the findings of art historians Vu (2001) and Nguyen & Le (2012), who found that between 111 BC and 934, traditions and customs were based on Buddhist theories and that the rules at the time reflected this philosophy. During this period in history, village structures began to develop as a result of people being taught in community halls; this method is maintained today through the exhibiting of artworks. Irons (2008), Fisher (2002), and Nguyen and Le

(2012) found that between 934 and 1883, Vietnamese Taoist customs began to develop, with an emphasis on developing Vietnamese identity. Taoism was to become a unique aspect of Vietnamese belief. On the one hand, Taoism led people to believe in the natural world and its myths; on the other, it encouraged people to learn how to be responsible for each other, ranging from social to family relationships. As a belief, Taoism guided members of the family on how to trust and support one another. Most leaders capitalised on this belief, especially in war times, such as 'Uncle' Ho Chi Minh and 'Father' Nguyen van Thieu. Historians Nguyen & Le (2012), Fisher (2002), Marr and White (1988) and Hoang (1995) found that although the elements of Tam Giao were mixed between 1883 and 1945, Confucianism became the main focus during that period. Vietnamese society used Confucianist customs to maintain their traditions. During this period, people were motivated by individual identity following the Confucian example. After 1945, Confucian communism developed in the North of Vietnam, while Confucian capitalism developed in the South. Both leaders, Ho Chi Minh and Nguyen Van Thieu, adapted Confucian beliefs when establishing their new governments. Indeed, Tam Giao beliefs have evolved and, in turn, changed traditions and customs, as reflected in artworks throughout history.

This section introduces the two different art styles that have been used—namely, Buddhism and Taoism—to depict the war trauma context in Vietnamese art history. Phan's (1997a) research found that the Buddhist style is evident in *Thousand hands and thousand eyes* (see Figure 3). This work of art represents people's feelings after war. As discussed in Chapter 3, *Thousand hands and thousand eyes*, created by an unknown artist of the seventeenth century, interpreted Buddhist theories. According to Phan (1997a, p. 160), this artwork depicts a mixed feeling of hope, desire and anxiety. The sculpture was made at the end of the civil war in the seventeenth century (see Chapter 3). Ha and Nguyen (1998, pp. 25 & 182–3) and Phan (1997a, pp. 117–211) provide evidence of a Taoist perspective on the same war in the work entitled *Dancing fairies* (see Figure 7). These two examples illustrate how Buddhist and Taoist beliefs have influenced Vietnamese artists and underscore how Tam Giao elements can be used differently in art expression.

The review of the available research literature proved challenging because there are, at times, starkly differing interpretations and perspectives. The research found two different opinions in relation to the civil war in Vietnam in the seventeenth century. This difference in opinion concerned the number of pagodas and temples

increasing at the time and that 80 per cent of the population were Buddhist. According to Phan (1997a, pp. 117–18), people experienced better conditions in their lives during the 100 years of the civil war because governments and their armies ‘were busy fighting’ and, therefore, the community had time available to build many pagodas. As a result, artistic development at its peak point focused on Buddhism. However, art historians Nguyen and Le (2012, pp. 565–74) found that when Tam Giao people had to confront their mental depression, they often went to pagodas to pray for their anxieties to be reduced, and many of them wanted to become Buddhists. Nguyen and Le’s argument addressed Tam Giao psychology. Their argument has been supported by evidence in the form of artworks produced in communal halls, which still remain today. I have confirmed this assertion (see Chapter 1).

## **Phase 2**

The second phase of this narrative research focused on cultural trauma in recent years. Relevant theories of cultural trauma and its symptoms were identified and applied to examine the sequence of postwar traumas in Vietnam. *Toward a theory of cultural trauma* by Jeffrey Alexander (2004), *Psychological trauma and cultural trauma* by Neil J. Smelser (2004) and the work of three other scholars, Eyerman (2004a), Giesen (2004) and Sztompka (2004) were used to identify and interpret Vietnamese cultural traumas. In this chapter, a narrative method is used to examine how these cultural traumas have influenced on Vietnamese art since 1985.

In this phase, the reading and research materials were separated into two parts. The first part was to find evidence of how global arts practitioners are creating new ways of expressing traumas. Smith’s (2011) research shows that many artists are using global tools to express their opinions. The second part of this phase was to explore the new ways of expression by those Vietnamese artists who used Tam Giao elements in their artworks. The two parts of this phase were conducted systematically through collection of the literature and statements; several discussions about these concerns with art historians and art critics in Vietnam (see Appendix 3); and a review of relevant literature, including Smith (2011), Taylor (2007), Osborne (1982), and Vietnamese scholars Tran (2007), Phan (1997a) and Nguyen (2010). These multiple interpretations clearly identified why Vietnamese artists used different methods of artistic presentation in the postwar period in



Vietnam. The intersections of narrative construction emerged by assembling all data segments, with the results showing significant aspects.

Further research was required to identify the meanings of artworks that used cultural metaphors for depicting political and social concerns. Pollock posits that aesthetic canons create different lenses for artistic expression (Pollock cited in Holly & Moxey, 2002, p. 159). Pollock also considers the different ways in which artists have used aesthetic symbols to portray postwar traumas. This significant point will be addressed in Chapter 2. Without an understanding of the aesthetic symbols that express political or social concerns, the viewer is unable to discern the traumas expressed in Tam Giao art. Therefore, Chapter 2 also provides a selection of aesthetic methods and shows how to interpret elements such as similes, metaphors and symbolism. Examples include the use of the fairy as a symbol alluding to a political purpose in the seventeenth-century relief carving on wood *Dancing fairies* and in *Inner world* in 1996, and the use of a man-animal as a symbol of war trauma in *Guernica* to allude to the outcomes of World War I, following Green (1985). Systematic observation of the relevant narrative materials allowed assertions to be investigated and connections made linked to one another.

### **Phase 3**

The third phase of this narrative research focused on a systematic observation of the subjective experiences of 20 art participants from North and South Vietnam who were interviewed during two months of fieldwork (see Appendix 2). This phase of the research aimed to examine the narrative materials, which were focused on the Doi Moi and post-Doi Moi periods and on the artists who participated in the interviews.

Two leading art critics in Vietnam, Nguyen Quan and Trinh Cung, were the first art participants to take part in this research, and the interviews took place in their studios in 2012. These two critics provided a broad network including artists and art critics in the North and South of Vietnam. A snowball sampling method was used, whereby participants introduced others who later participated in this research. They included critics, artists, writers and film directors who live and work in North and South Vietnam. Some of them lived in the South before 1975 and the end of the Vietnam War (see Appendix 2). Data was collated as follows: constructive collection and transcription of information provided by interviews; observation; examination of

personal documents provided by interviewees; and, finally, a re-reading all data to confirm assertions. As a result of this investigation, three topics emerged for further analysis:

1. Tam Giao elements have been used and practised in artwork through history and continue to evolve in the current art practice of contemporary artists.
2. War traumas have never been directly expressed in the visual arts context due to Vietnamese tradition.
3. Tam Giao customs may be discerned in the visual arts as metaphorical symbols used by artists to express their social and political concerns.

The fieldwork research also found that artists who lived in the North had developed their visual art practices differently from those who lived in the South of Vietnam before 1975 (Nguyen Quan 2012, pers. comm., 23 December; Trinh Cung 2012, pers. comm., 21 December). By the 1985, however, the context had begun to change. Artists from 12 studios in North and South Vietnam who participated in the interviews provided evidence that after 1985, artists from both regions shared similar concerns about political and social issues and addressed these concerns in similar ways in visual arts contexts (see Appendix 4).

### **Data Confirming the Assertions**

Printed materials were correlated with personal documents to further analyse how Tam Giao elements have been used to represent postwar traumas in visual arts contexts. These were the most implicit aspects of the narrative materials, and tacit understanding of the context in this research was made explicit after interviewing art participants, which will be further discussed in Chapter 3. Artists provided their personal stories and artworks as evidence and gave detailed answers to the same set of questions. Based on evidence obtained from the narrative data and materials, it appears that Tam Giao elements had changed to suit the new conditions. These materials also provided evidence that Vietnamese individual identity began to evolve to adapt to a newly forming society.

### **Choosing Instruments for Case Studies**

Before embarking on the first fieldwork research, narrative materials indicated that the group of artists known as the Gang of Five in Hanoi represents the Doi Moi

group of artists in Vietnam. However, the fieldwork research illuminated that the Doi Moi group comprises two subtypes. Nguyen Quan, Dang Thi Khue and Trinh Cung were the founding members of a group of Doi Moi artists who endeavoured to lead young artists to create new forms of artistic expression after the initiation of the Doi Moi Policies. There were actually two groups of young artists: the Gang of Five artists in the North of Vietnam and a group of 10 abstract artists in the South of Vietnam (Le 2012, pers. comm., 23 December; Le 2012, pers. comm., 21 January).

The collection of interview data was important for testing the research hypothesis. Results did not only rely on general understandings of the information sourced from printed materials; these were supplemented by the information proffered by interview subjects that reflected their life experiences and showed what—and how—social and cultural changes had occurred in their communities. The fieldwork research methods and procedures had to be flexible. I did not follow any narrative rules due to the subjective nature of the theme and the need to follow the interests of the interview subject and the topics that arose in the course of the interview. Nevertheless, there was a correlation between the materials collected and the narrative research. Through this process, the themes of postwar trauma expressed in artworks and in the artists' lives reflected the sequence of traumas in the contemporary period in Vietnam. In much the same fashion, this research process facilitated a further examination of the two selected groups of artists—namely, the Doi Moi and the post-Doi Moi groups—and enabled me to determine which of the artists to focus on. Two artists in the Doi Moi group were selected for the case studies that are discussed in Chapter 4: Dang Xuan Hoa, one of the Gang of Five artists in Hanoi, and Hoang Tuong, one of the 10 artists of the abstract movement in Ho Chi Minh City. Both artists were born in 1956. Four post-Doi Moi artists were selected for the case studies that are discussed in Chapter 5: Nguyen Minh Thanh, Dinh Thi Tham Poong, Vu Dinh Tuan and Ly Tran Quynh Giang, all born after 1970. These artists used their contemporary artistic expressions to represent different aspects of Vietnamese cultural traumas.

The following section focuses on how ethnographic methodologies have been employed as part of this research.

## **Ethnographic Research**

## **Doi Moi and post-Doi Moi groups of artists as instruments to test the hypothesis of the second objective**

The second fieldwork trip was focused on interviewing the selected artists and art critics who specialise in Vietnamese contemporary art (see Appendix 5). Each artist received an individualised set of questions specific to their studio practice. Systematic observational methods were used, including verbal questioning, voice recording and collecting the artist's personal writing.

### **Interviewing methods**

What interviewing methods can be used in an ethnographic project to suit the different groups of Vietnamese people in this study? Indeed, conducting interviews with artists in Tam Giao culture requires a deep knowledge of the culture in order to deal with the diversity of art-related themes. Tam Giao people often use Confucian manners and subtle behaviours during interviews. Another important point is that if the interviewer is competent in the discussion of art in different contexts, it can lead to further discussion and more in-depth responses from the artists. Once trust was established between interviewer and interviewee, the artist began to talk about the more nuanced aspects of the subjects and meanings in their artworks. Interview questions were sometimes expanded upon when artists wanted to explain how they used metaphorical expressions in their art in order to avoid public scrutiny, and they admitted never having discussed these issues at any other time.

After visiting many art studios during the first and second fieldwork visits, the evidence demonstrates that the art represented different aspects of trauma in the contemporary period. Some artists work with traditional art forms such as painting and sculpture, while others use performance or installation art to express their concerns. Others have engaged in art activism and supported the local community to find strategies for coping with traumas. The interview methods were successful in ascertaining the ways in which the artists' lives needed to be understood in relation to their topics and in determining the art concepts that needed to be addressed in the interview. Each artist's background was different; therefore, each interview was adapted to the artist's respective interests. Details of the results of the interviews can be found in Chapters 5 and 6.

The following is an example of an interview with a Vietnamese artist who has used Vietnamese traditions in a new way to represent Vietnamese cultural trauma in two series of artworks entitled *Lady I, II, III, IV* and *Lady V, VI, VII, VIII*. (See Chapter 5 for images of the works and Appendix 6 for the interview questions.)

The atmosphere in Vu Dinh Tuan's studio was calm and quiet. His welcome was warm, but he was very reserved in his Confucian manner at the beginning of the interview. His manner was carefully respected in return. The conversation began with the literature of Vietnam. The artist began to provide a thick description of Vietnamese literature, related to a historic expression in literature, and he explained how he used this in a similar way as a means of expression in his contemporary artwork. The term *thick description* refers to the way in which descriptions of events or stories are embedded in cultural forms. Thick descriptions give the intentions and meanings of a context (Cobb & Hagermaster, 1987; Geertz, 1973). Vu Dinh Tuan said he used two different metaphorical symbols in his two series of artworks. The first symbolic image was a hand fan, an image used in Vietnamese classical literature. Truong Tan used this image to introduce open up his subject matter in the first series of artworks (see Figure 38). It is worth noting that artist Truong Tan also used this symbol for introducing opening up political matters in a recent installation artwork, *Thang Thang and illusion* (Truong, 2011).

Vu Dinh Tuan uses the hand-fan symbol to convey a 'sudden' change in how global art is influencing Vietnamese society, and he questions what will happen to Vietnamese culture. In the second series of artworks, he uses a metaphor that originates from a Vietnamese idiom, 'If I knew I would be in this miserable situation, I would rather be a bird, for a better life'. The transformational process depicting a caterpillar becoming a butterfly alludes to the cultural changes in Vietnam and the associated traumas (see Chapter 5).

The interview with Vu Dinh Tuan demonstrates that Vietnamese cultural traumas have affected individuals a great deal. People therefore need to find strategies to cope. Consequently, personal identity needs to evolve in order to adapt to the new environment. The case of Vu Dinh Tuan (the artist and his artwork) was used to examine assertions in the narrative materials and allowed for a systematic gathering of information from observation, discussions about literature and the sharing of knowledge. His artworks, together with his explanations, illustrate the impact of cultural traumas on individuals, and this in turn contributes to the examination of the

research hypothesis. Ethnographic methods were employed during the second fieldtrip, between December 2013 and January 2014. The systematic observation and data analysis are presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Evidence and materials collected during the second fieldtrip shows that global information is affecting every aspect of people's lives in urban areas. The information was gathered from two types of sources. The first was in the form of narrative materials provided by Irons (2008), Fisher (2002), Marr and White (1998), Kastfelt (2005) and Woodside (1989). The second source type consisted of systematic art participant observations. Ethnographic method allowed me to examine how global information affects Vietnamese people. Dinh Thi Tham Poong and her art illustrate this aspect (see Chapter 5).

Global information affects Vietnamese society and result in changes in visual arts contexts. In this research, I looked for a symptom of this factor as a whole, collecting materials that showed a cluster of international artists creating redundant links and discovered a selfsame structure within this symptom. According to Smith (2011, pp. 8–13), an international art critic, the global art system in China, England and America has created change in many aspects of society and caused cultural changes. He also identifies how the context of war traumas can effect political change and give rise to new social movements.

In summary, the research materials and evidence not only demonstrate the existence of a broad interest in the topic of this thesis but also underscore the scope for exploring cultural changes based on ethnographic evidence. This method could also be used to explain why and how Tam Giao adapts in response to new social formations in Vietnam.

### **An examination of social conflicts causing a new social formation**

The aim of the third fieldtrip in 2014 was to further examine Vietnamese social formations in this contemporary period. Meetings were set up with the vice-chancellor of the Vietnam University of Fine Arts in Hanoi and with the director of Menifque Art Museum to provide an opportunity to understand the relationship between society and art institutions and the type of social conflicts associated with the formation of a new society in Vietnam.

The meeting with the vice-chancellor of the Vietnam University of Fine Arts included visits to all departments of the university. The purpose of the visit was to research institutional attitudes and academic development in the contemporary period. An interview with Duong Thuy Lieu, the director of Menifique Art Museum, provided insights into how she developed her leadership skills, and later, through determination and cultivating the opportunities available to her, she moved into the visual arts context. Her story revealed the secrecy that lies behind institutional practices (Duong Thuy Lieu 2014, pers. comm., 24 May). An exploration of these and other promising new art trends are presented in Chapter 6.

There were two reasons to test the two institutions above. The first was to examine how visual arts movements as a whole, including visual arts institutions, have coped with the new social transformation. Duong Thuy Lieu proffered insights into how the postwar society has operated in the global context to create a new social formation in Vietnam. The second was to test how the overcoming of Vietnamese cultural traumas is evident in the materials collected and in the testimony of the art participants. This has enabled a much improved analysis of how institutional and cultural changes have been effected in order to manage historical traumas in this contemporary period. These investigations are presented in Chapter 6.

Ethnographic research in the form of interviews was an effective aid in investigating the thesis research question; the participants' subjective experiences contributed many factors to explain the broader historical and artistic contexts and how Vietnamese social formations are being established. The interviews identified three broad factors for the types of conflicts causing the current new social formation. The first factor identified by artists during the interviews was their experience of distressing emotions due to their postwar traumas and the challenge of how to cope with these experiences. The second factor was the different development of urban areas from rural areas, and globalization influencing their ideologies and creating complex negotiations in this social formation. The third factor is the forced changes in values and beliefs. Ultimately, Vietnamese people must decide how to build their new environment based on the Tam Giao cultural changes.

## **Conclusion**

After three years working on this research, using various methods of ethnographic and narrative research, I found that the most significant aspect of the process was a deepened interest in the thesis topic. Indeed, narrative materials and ethnographic fieldwork consistently demonstrated a tangible embodiment of Tam Giao culture in this contemporary period. Artists showed their Confucian behaviour through their use of subtle manners, and their artworks showed that they represented Vietnamese customs as a form of creative expression. The Tam Giao elements have also been used in new forms of artistic expression. A second interest that evolved from this research was in the different ways in which Tam Giao elements have been modified to cope with cultural trauma in various cases. The third interest pertains to an exploration of Vietnamese social formation that developed in the postwar trauma period, which shows how urban areas have endeavoured to cope with the complexities of postwar traumas. In summation, it is evident that Vietnamese personal identity is changing to adapt to the dynamic phenomenon of contemporary society.



## **Chapter 2:**

### **Metaphorical Expression in the Visual Arts for Portraying War Trauma Contexts**

This chapter analyses how Vietnamese culture determines the artistic expression of Vietnam's postwar traumas in both traditional and contemporary art. The main aim of this chapter is to show the conventional use of metaphors in visual arts contexts in order to better understand how Vietnamese artists represent nuanced meanings. The term *metaphor* in this context refers to the visual representation of a person, place, thing, or idea through the use of an associated image, suggesting a point of similarity in order to create new meanings. Examples of artworks from different cultures will be used to explain different types of metaphorical expression. An examination of the function of metaphor derived from everyday language and Vietnamese folk art as used in selected Vietnamese artworks will demonstrate the utility of Taoist-Buddhist metaphorical devices. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first identifies what symbols are and how metaphors use them. The second demonstrates how artists use conventional metaphors. The third addresses the use of Taoist-Buddhist metaphors in artworks. The fourth examines how Vietnamese artists represent their experiences of war traumas through metaphors.

#### **Symbols and Metaphors**

According to MacCormac (1971, p. 246), there are two major differences between symbol and metaphor. First, a symbol can represent an event or thing, and there does not need to be an analogy between the symbol used and the event or thing, whereas a metaphor makes a direct comparison between the two structural components. An image of a wolf may represent a sports club, for example, but to use a wolf as a metaphor and say 'man is a wolf' is to draw an analogy between two symbols 'man' and 'wolf'. Second, a metaphor produces structural absurdity and psychological surprise when taken literally, for example, 'the chair wobbled happily' or 'the chair squatted sadly'. In this case, the symbol *chair* is associated with happy or sad moods, creating a metaphor that expresses or suggests a meaning. Metaphors require the use of rhetorical thinking tools that, in art, communicate to the audience through the transfer of the artist's cognitive view (or their cultural thinking

process) on to a surface or an area using visual elements. Through the use of metaphor, an artist can bring truths to the audience, truths that reflect the artist's cultural upbringing and influences.

### **How Visual Artists Use Metaphors**

Romero and Soria (1998) state that, as a general characteristic, our metaphorical systems are generated from outside their ordinary meanings. For instance, in the sentence 'He wears a loud tie', the word *loud* is an adjective to express a metaphorical meaning produced by restructuring the concept of sound into the concept of colour. A metaphor may be a determining factor when trying to change a person's point of view, but once it has lost its strangeness it becomes conventional and reflects everyday experience (Romero & Soria, 1998, pp. 149–51).

Aldrich defines visual metaphor as a synthesis or interanimation of two visual images (A and B), whose colours, forms or composition cause us to link them visually into a single metaphor unit, C. He explains that the combination of A and B produces a new thing, C, which transcends A and B. He also explains that C is logically dependent on A and B and that C (in the visual arts) creates an artful paraphrase to produce new values (Green, 1985, p. 64). In the visual arts, an object can be used as a visual metaphor. For example, *Bull head*, 1942, by Picasso (see Appendix 12) represents Picasso's statement: 'my sculptures are plastic metaphors' (Aldrich, as cited in Green, 1985, p. 61). This work resonates humorously, the source of its two parts, the bicycle as bull and the bull as bicycle (A and B), combining to form C, a wild beast that is subdued by man (Green, 1985, pp. 71–2).

Serig (2006) argues that if art is interpreted metaphorically, it becomes an inquiry into complex symbolic activity that directly involves thinking and presentation and the construction of meaning and expansion of reality (pp. 229–47). *Guernica* is an example of the use of powerful visual images based on everyday objects that are in turn imbued with philosophical significance (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5: Picasso, 1937, *Guernica*, mixed media**

Source: Green, 1985, p. 66

According to Green (1985), on the literal level, the light at the top of the canvas is an electric light that was designed in a 'paradoxical fashion' to look like a sun flower in Picasso's earlier sketches; however, Picasso included it as a metallic 'electric sun', bristling with threatening spikes, that dominates the top centre of the canvas in the final work. Green explores Picasso's allusions to classical and Christian iconography using figurative expressions. The lamp's light rays 'echo' the shape of a bomb inserted into the mouth of the horse that Picasso used as a symbol of the 'people' (p. 67). Green notes that Picasso's metaphors create paradoxical connections: the modern source of a beneficent power that also contains the seeds of violent destruction. According to Green, the electric light as a symbol of the sun translates into, and harshly anticipates, the first nuclear fireball eight year later.

The oil lamp in *Guernica* represents light in a different kind of way. It is a primitive and 'natural' light, creating the pyramidal pattern in the centre of the canvas. This source of light brings to the viewer a representational truth inside a dramatic scene peopled with symbolic expression. For example, a nude thrusting her arm and 'tragic mask' head through the open window on the right of the canvas creates a feeling of conflict and evokes trauma. Below, another metaphorical symbol, an anxious female, is looking upwards towards the light, half kneeling, half running, the figure broken into pieces by the light. Picasso depicts the rays of the electric light, which are inversely repeated in the flames that destroy both house and human. The metaphors of light sources in *Guernica* thus represent dual sources of life and destruction.

The artwork is absent of colour. There is only black and white, and shades of grey symbolising the absence of life (Green, 1985, p. 68). *Guernica* shows intrinsic metaphorical connections, using the similar elliptical forms of the central light image to refer to different objects, such as animal-men, haloes, crowns, suns, bombs, flames and light fixtures and to include them into its central theme: war trauma. Extrinsic metaphorical expression in this artwork is established by allusion to the formal conventions of this period, such as Christ's descent from the cross.

Picasso uses the contrast between light and dark, war and peace, truth and error, humanity and inhumanity to generate his potent visual images. *Guernica's* use of metaphors also demonstrates Picasso's Spanish cultural influences, such as devotional religious painting and the classical symbol of the man-animal, especially the minotaur, which also reflects the Spanish tradition of *Corrida de torros*, trans: bullfight, (Carmona, 1955, p. 99). The artist uses metaphors to express a complex social and cultural reality. Picasso depicts the conflicts and traumas of European society in the early twentieth century, specifically the bombing of a civilian community by fascist military aircraft. The bombed town of Guernica itself becomes a metaphor for the wider issue of ideology and the abuse of power.

Vietnamese people use traditional folk culture metaphors that are still popular in everyday experience and practice. There are two reasons why this is so. First, Vietnamese people use numerous idioms, similes and metaphors in everyday language with their children and families. This is the remaining legacy of thousands of years of poems and songs (nursery songs or songs for special purposes) that contain many visual analogies expressing many different subjects. The majority of people develop their metaphorical skills as a natural process. Second, in Vietnamese political history, there is no background of democracy; people lived under the strick control of Confucian feudalist governments for several thousand years and later under a Confucian communist system. Living under such restrictions, people needed to use metaphors to avoid speaking openly to each other about taboo subjects (Ha, 1987).

### **Taoist- Buddhist Metaphorical Expression**

Metaphorical expression differs between cultures and can be understood through aesthetic systems. As discussed in the Literature Review, there are two different aesthetic systems referred to in this thesis. The philosophy and practice of art in

Western culture is based on the evolution of a pictorial realism based on perspective. However, in traditional Vietnamese visual organisation, the most significant object or figure in a picture is depicted in the centre and is shown as much larger in proportion to other details. The relative sizes of objects or figures in an artwork contribute to their meanings. The use of pictorial space is aimed at clarifying meaning.

The second significant aspect in recognising metaphorical expression is the need to understand the blending of Tam Giao elements. The blending of three philosophies and beliefs, called Tam Giao, was the most significant form of rhetorical thinking in Vietnam for many centuries. Vietnamese metaphorical devices come from customs, folk art and literature and can be considered according to two categories of what Needham has called 'correlative thinking' (Needham, as cited in Bokenkamp, 1989, p. 216). The first category, the *apparent*, refers to the actual appearance of objects or figures in real life. The second category, the *inherent*, refers to symbols that have conventional meanings. The various apparent and inherent symbolic figures have been used to create metaphorical expression in the visual arts. For example, a Vietnamese folk image uses the characters for *cock* to represent Confucianist characteristics in an apparent way (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6: Folk printing, 'Good Luck' Cock, ink on Dzo paper**

Source: Hoang, 1995, p. 15

This folk print has been used as a traditional New Year gift for Vietnamese boys. The cock symbol depicts the bird's outward appearance and its characteristics. This piece of art is an ancient traditional symbol and is used to represent the five virtues of a Vietnamese Confucian:

1. The red comb is a simile for a hat, which represents *Van* (academic).
2. The sharp spurs are like swords and daggers, which represent *Vu* (military).
3. The whole form of the cock depicts the character of *Dzung* (bravery).
4. The main habit of a cock is to share food, which represents *Nhan* (kindness).
5. The cock's punctual early morning crow acts as an alarm for farmers to get up in time for work, which represents *Tin* (loyalty).

This symbol is one of many different folk symbols from the Dong-ho folk art tradition. Children in Vietnam learn about morals through the receipt of New Year gifts and oft these symbols are often used in teaching materials in the classroom (Hoang, 1995).

The second category, inherent, has been used in Vietnam by way of Taoist simile and visual analogue to represent religious contexts and the subject being depicted. *Dancing fairies*, a sixteenth-century artwork, uses symbolic figures to expand upon Confucian characteristics and depicts the destruction of Confucian identity by war (see Figure 7). The Vietnamese cultural similes used in this artwork also extend Buddhist literature by adding Taoist myths and magical appearances. *Dancing fairies* contains the five Confucian virtues and shows how Vietnamese people developed metaphorical devices in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In this artwork, the use of the dancing fairy symbol connects simile and metaphor to express the community's feelings about the civil wars. The Taoist-Buddhist metaphors used in this artwork can be explained with reference to Glicksohn & Goodblatt (1993).



**Figure 7: Unknown artist, seventeenth century, *Dancing fairies*, relief carving on wood, Tay Dang Hall, Son Tay Hanoi**

Source: Phan, 1997a, p. 148

The dancing fairy wearing a formal hat used for ritual presentation is in the centre of the artwork. The hat represents Confucian moral aspects that are 'carried' by a Taoist messenger. The formal hat and the fairy convey a warning message to the authorities about how they have conducted their duties.

The swords on the two sides of the artwork represent the military. Sword symbols are derived from the shape of the wing feathers of the king eagle. The symbolic military swords allude to the wrongdoings of the military and represent the cruelty of royal authority. As an emblem of war, the swords stapled to the ground are linked iconographically to the central ambiguous metaphor of the dancing contest.

Gestures of bravery are portrayed through the two royal figurative symbols, the dragon and the eagle king at the top of the artwork. However, this bravery is not supportive; the positions and gestures of the dragon and eagle king suggest aggression between the two.

The two remaining Confucian virtues of sharing (kindness) and loyalty are metaphorical and hidden. The two types of dancing in this artwork evoke the destruction of Confucian government structures, which emphasised the virtues of sharing and loyalty. The artist uses the two royal symbolic images and represents their dancing movements, using long sharp feather shapes entangled in a fight. The king eagle and dragon forms, brave and powerful, have been expressed elegantly,

and each shows their determination to win. They perform their dances on top of the dead, brutal animals in the foreground. The artwork depicts the disloyalty and determination of each party—the eagle king and the dragon—and their consistent fighting, regardless of their duties to serve the Le Kings, which caused nearly 200 years of civil war (1592–1788). The second type of dancing is a formal religious dance by the fairy in the centre of the work that suggests a warning about the evils of fighting and sends a message about the people's desire to stop this violence.

This piece of art is set in a Taoist-Buddhist religious context, contesting the civil war at that time. In *Dancing fairies*, the complexity of the Taoist expression is inherent in the use of magical characteristics built from folk literature. It combines the categories of *apparent* and *inherent* metaphorical devices in Taoist-Buddhism by using the eagle king and the dragon symbols with their movements and positions. *Dancing fairies* links Buddhist beliefs and the issue of war into a visual metaphor. The unknown artist of this work unified these war issues through the Buddhist theoretical notion of 'cause and effect'. The artwork reminds the authorities that in the circle of life a person may cause others trouble and that these troubles will eventually turn back against that person. In other words, if people look after others, benefits will come back to them in many other ways in their life.

*Dancing fairies* portrays the development of a complex and unstable political situation and was produced under very strict conditions that did not allow for political expression. Vietnamese feudalism was a highly autocratic system (Nguyen & Le, 2012, pp. 375–442); therefore, this artwork uses highly symbolic and metaphorical forms, which have survived through the centuries.

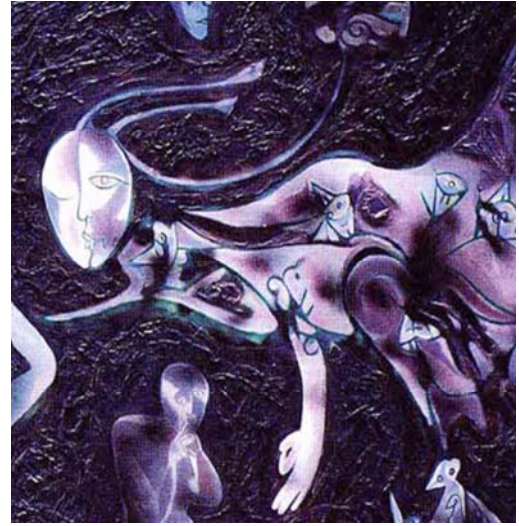
### **New Visual Metaphors in Vietnamese Artworks Since 1985**

The Taoist fairy, a popular symbol in Vietnamese customs, has been used in many art forms throughout history. The meaning of the fairy symbol in literature and art changes according to the context in which it is used (see Figure 8). For example, Nguyen Xuan Tiep's *Inner world*, 1996, depicts a fairy based on the rhetorical Taoist style; however, Tiep's fairy also provides the viewer with a visual clue to the changes occurring in the Vietnamese traditional outlook.





A seventeenth-century traditional Tam Giao fairy  
(detail from *Dancing fairies*; Phan, 1997a, p. 148)



A modernist Tam Giao fairy created in  
1996 (detail from *Inner world*; Confluence  
(1997, p. 47)

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**Figure 8: Unknown artist, seventeenth century, *Dancing fairies*, relief carving on wood (section-left) and Nguyen Xuan Tiep, 1996, painting, *Inner world* (section-right)**

Source: Phan, 1997a

*Inner world* (see Figure 9) portrays individuals in Vietnamese society during the embargo period. Prior to an examination of how the artist uses metaphor, it is necessary to mention the social and political issues at that time. After the destruction of the Vietnam War ended in 1975, the country faced daunting obstacles to its development. In the first 10 years after the war, the Vietnamese people experienced many challenges in all aspects of life, ranging from economic hardship to individual life crises brought about by sudden and unexpected cultural changes after the war. These traumas were experienced by all families in Vietnam (Vo, 1990). This artwork uses four types of symbols to depict individual and communal calamity using Tam Giao metaphors to present how traumas had occurred in society.



**Figure 9: Nguyen Xuan Tiep, 1996, painting, *Inner world*, oil on canvas**

Source: Confluence (1997, p. 47)

The subject matter of *Inner world* can be understood through the use of the selected symbols and metaphors. The four types of symbols use Taoist-Buddhist metaphors to represent critical life problems, and the forms and positions of the symbols connect them into a complex metaphor of the traumas that were unfamiliar out of the ordinary in Vietnamese life and which people found difficult to cope with.

On a literal level, the image is read from right to left, commencing at the bottom of the artwork and ending at the top. The four types of symbols are the flying fairy near the centre of the artwork, the upside-down human figure at the centre, the seated human and animal forms on two sides of the upside-down figure, and the Taoist mother-figure at the top left of the artwork. In this artwork, the fairy is depicted in a long dress printed with images of pigs, rats and flowers, which do not belong in Vietnamese traditions. The head of this fairy, in the shape of a light globe, has antennae instead of the usual traditional hat. The upside-down figure in the centre of the artwork represents a feeling of remorse about the current lives of individuals. There are three seated humans and some human-animal forms, which have been used to support the idea of anguish depicted by the upside-down figure, and which amplify the context of this artwork. On the top of the artwork, a tied-up mother-figure in the 'eye-cave' supports the idea of isolation. All figures manifest behaviours of

withdrawal. According to the artist all figures are self-lit, alluding to the traumas of that period (Le, 2014, pers. comm., January).

The artist uses lighting metaphorically to convey restrictedness and the fear of a loss of unity through non-communication with others. The light-globe head of the fairy in the centre of the canvas symbolises awareness' of the current problems during the embargo. The antennae portray the idea of loss and of searching for some news or further communication. Below the fairy, in the centre, a figure that is naked is in sharp contrast to the fairy, who wears a long dress. This naked figure is engaged in an awkward 'hand walking' and touches the fairy's hand. The fairy and the upside-down figure represent different meanings and use two different systems of illumination. The fairy alludes to hope, myths and magical wishes from outside this world that may help to reduce the current trauma. The second source of self-illumination, shown by the upside-down figure, indicates the individual's need to find his or her own perception of the self and the way to survive during this period of economic hardship. The upside-down figure also represents the idea of looking back to the past as well as to the future when encountering difficulties created by traumas (Nguyen Xuan Tiep, 2014, pers. comm., January). Thus, the fairy's light-globe head is linked to the upside-down figure's self-illumination by means of the work's central metaphor of light to suggest the emotional response of the Vietnam War survivor to the circumstances of emptiness. The seated human figures next to the upside-down figure, and the animal-men arranged from left to right across the canvas, portray isolation and inaction. Similarly, the Taoist mother symbol obstructed by a cave of eyes on the top left of the painting suggests isolation.

The structural organisation of *Inner world* uses thick, dark, broken shapes in the background, in contrast with the figures, and thus contributes to the feelings of sorrow and anxiety. The context of this artwork is conveyed by the central Taoist metaphors, which in turn lead to the central question of this context: Where is our liberty and life? This question is posed using the fairy symbol and is supported by the various other figurative expressions in this painting that represents the Vietnamese wish for freedom from anxiety and poverty.

These two fairies, one created in the late sixteenth century and the other in the twentieth century, show the viewer the evolution of a culture's outlook and beliefs. Both artworks portray war, especially the impact of war on individual lives, but the work of the sixteenth century also acknowledges Tam Giao traditional beliefs and

underscores the potential for Confucian authority to succeed in the wider cultural setting. However, *Inner world*, through the central visual metaphor, expresses the idea that individuals and society are abandoning the traditional Confucian concepts of loyalty and of sharing with others. Confucian harmony and unity have been silenced and are unable to provide support to individuals. While the artwork depicts an environment of emptiness, it also alludes to the coming tense clash between Vietnamese traditions and the globalised economy.

This section addresses the social and political symptoms that determined the ways in which artists changed both their artistic expression as well as the visual metaphors they used in their artworks. After 1985, the Doi Moi Policy allowed Vietnamese artists the opportunity to see international art. Artists began to identify themselves as individuals and to express opinions based on their own personal contexts. According to Dr Natalia Kraevskaia, an independent curator specialising in Vietnamese contemporary art, artists were allowed to work and explore their own concepts and self-expression from 1990 (Menifigue Art Museum & Cuc Gallery, 2013).

Marr & White (1988) also state that from 1990 there was a significant shift in the political atmosphere in Vietnam, and Kraevskaia (2008) says that the political system at the time allowed artists to be more critical of political processes. Vietnam is still undergoing a period of change in all aspects, including in the perceptions of political traditions in communist leadership roles. Secretary-General Nguyen Van Linh said ‘a major problem was that the political system had become obscured in both directions—citizens were unable to comprehend the logic of higher decision making and leaders often felt in the dark, and unable to ascertain what was happening in the villages or factories’ (Nguyen Van Linh, 1988, cited in Marr & White, 1988, p. 5).

Under these circumstances, artists chose to use personal ways to express their themes and to represent their new and more-numerous subjects, and therefore a greater diversity of metaphors were used. Artists were inspired to attempt to change their ways of expression for three reasons. First, artists had to confront political uncertainty as the conservative Communist Party was against ‘political openness’ (Marr & White, 1988, p. 5). Second, artists were overwhelmingly subjected to the influence of international art, which caused a weakening of traditions, and artists began to attempt different ways of using hybrid metaphors in their artworks. Third,

the recent collection of new ideas remained unsynthesised and were opposed to traditionalism in the visual arts (Kraevskaia, 2008), and in this aspect the use of metaphorical expression shows the conflicts in this transitional period.

In the North, artists began to reduce their use of propaganda styles and instead began to use fresh visual analogies to express the impact of Vietnamese postwar traumas. In the South, artists adapted to the communist system's practices in social and cultural development (see Chapters 4 and 5). Artists had to cope with the harsh situations, and their work shows the negative effects of the Vietnamese socialist transformation.

As artists were freed from communist propaganda art, they began to openly depict specific events from wartime. This type of art can be seen in Buu Chi's artworks produced between 1971 and 1975 (see Appendix 14). These artworks openly communicated to different audiences and clearly demonstrated the influence of the international anti-war movement (Buu & Pham, 2012). The following is an examination of the three reasons for the circumstances after the Vietnam War that caused the transition in the visual arts. Buu Chi is a case study for this examination (see Appendix 15 for Buu Chi's biography).

*Reason 1: The conservative Communist Party versus the political system of 'openness'*

After 1985, Buu Chi, among other Vietnamese artists, expressed his concerns about the lack of freedom in creative work practices in Vietnam. In addition to artists, there was a new generation of communist politicians who wanted to introduce rapid social and political initiatives to develop culture after the war. However, this was contrary to the position of the conservative wing of the Communist Party. Nguyen Van Linh, the new Secretary-General, actively encouraged social transition and decided to add political 'openness' to the reform agenda by early 1988. However, the transition to reform would require time; after 30 years of communist propagandised practice, a rigid communist tradition had formed, and it would not be possible to achieve positive results by rapidly changing the system. In an interview, Dr Nguyen Khac Vien, a Vietnamese historian and literary critic (cited in Thayer, 1991, p. 23) said, 'the Party leads and the government administers ... but in fact, the party committees have monopolized everything'.

Buu Chi wrote the following passage in his diary after a communist party member commented on his artwork. The passage illustrates how the cultural 'monopoly' at the grassroots level affected creative activities and curtailed artistic expression:

Tai sao Buu Chi ve cong truong nha may ma tat ca deu dong cua im im?  
Nha may la noi hoat dong cua giai cap cong nhan tien tien, sao lai ve canh  
cua dong voi mot cham tron, co phai anh chi muon the hien mot nha tu  
khong?

Why did Buu Chi paint industrial areas and factories which are too quiet?  
Factories are places which represent the best of the working-class people,  
why did you paint doors closed and add a circle as a dot in your artwork? Do  
you want to represent factories as jails? (cited in Buu & Pham, 2012, p. 319)

Buu Chi responded to this matter with his work *Thanh cung met moi* (*Even the Saint is still tired*) (see Figure 10). In this work he portrays himself as a lonely saint, tired and disappointed. Buu Chi was feeling lost and doubted his beliefs. This artwork depicts his personal trauma and shows the contrast between suffering and ambiguity, desire and dissatisfaction, and belief and death, all of which arose from the uncertain circumstances in his life.





**Figure 10: Buu Chi, 1999, painting, *Even the Saint is still tired*, oil on canvas**

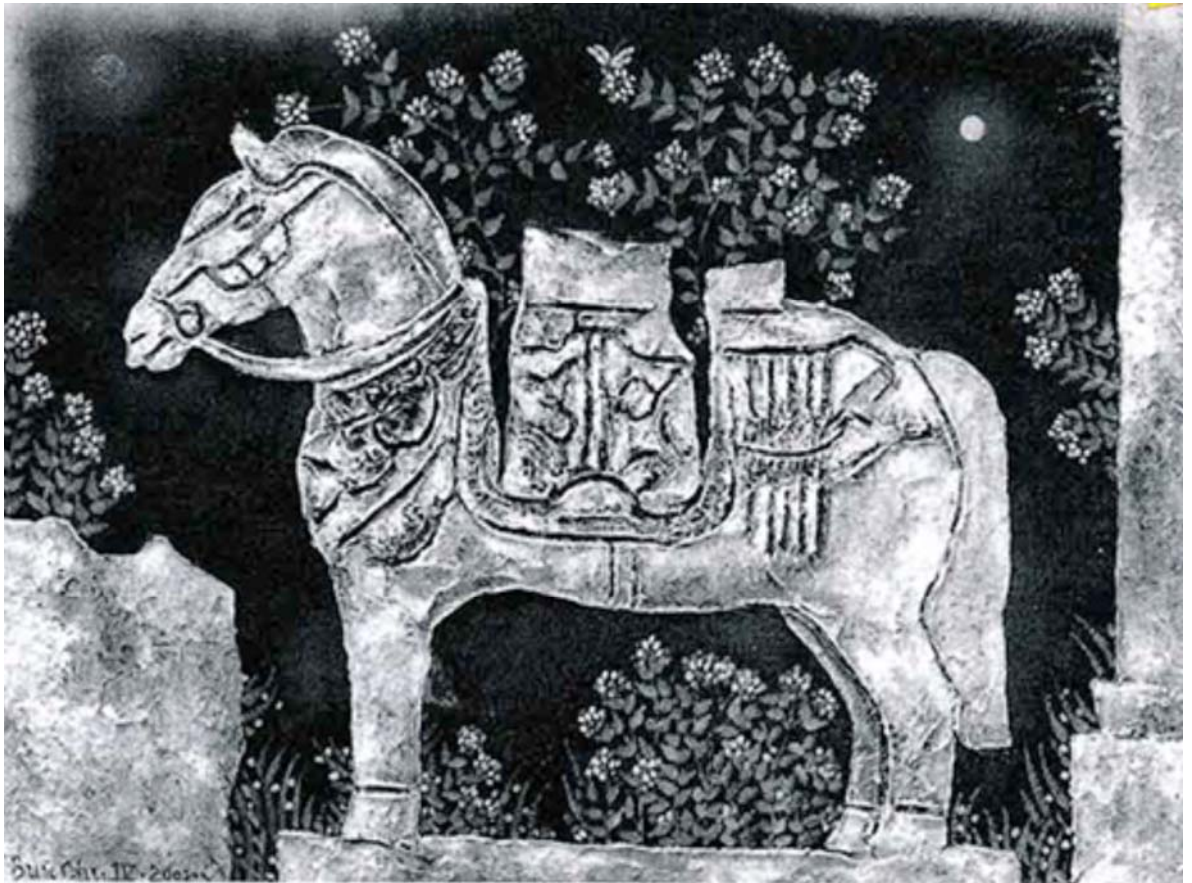
Source: Nguyen, as cited in Buu & Pham, p. 114

*Reason 2: The weakening of traditions and the attempts to use hybrid metaphors in different ways*

After 1990, the Doi Moi Policy allowed unlimited global online information about art into Vietnam, but it seemed to be only a cursory, superficial commercialised through many art markets. Nguyen (2008, pp. 66–7), a senior art critic in Vietnam, defines three categories of visual arts practice: (1) governmental art, (2) the art of the market and (3) joint venture art, which has support from foreign cultural foundations and centres, such as the Goethe Institute (Germany), L'Espace (France), the British Council, the Dante Alighieri Institute (Italy) and the Spanish Embassy.

Observing the manifest weakening of Vietnamese traditions, Buu Chi portrays this phenomenon through the use of two symbols in his artwork *Stone Horse and Flowers*, produced in 2001 (see Figure 11). These symbolic images express his concerns. The first image is a broken stone horse portrayed in the traditional horse form and motifs. The second is a hybrid flower symbol. Stone horses similar to Buu Chi's painted one can be found in many locations in Hue, a city in central Vietnam.

The horse image shows evidence of decay and destruction, representing the current ignorance of the values of the past. This first image is juxtaposed with the second—the hybrid flowers (depicting innocence) in the background. The artwork suggests that nature comes and goes; however, the decay or destruction of human values is irreversible. The two figurative images become Buu Chi's personal visual metaphors, and he unifies and transforms them to represent the weakening of the Vietnamese culture at the time.



**Figure 11: Buu Chi, 2001, painting, *Stone horse and flowers*, oil on canvas**

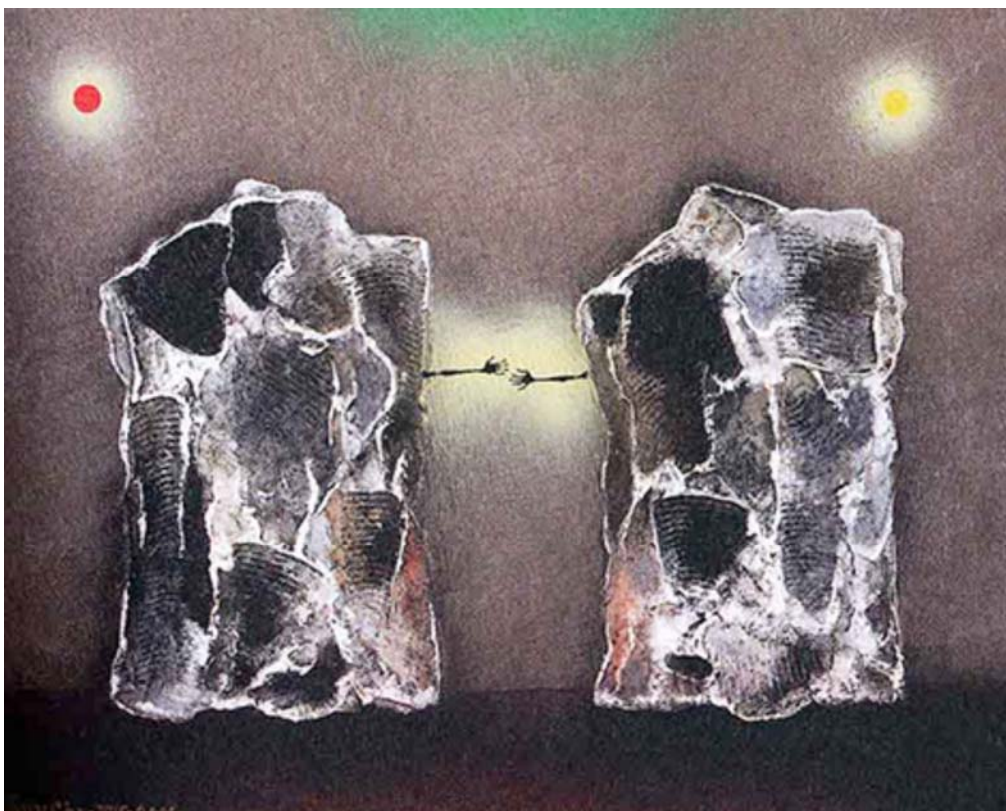
Source: Ngo, as cited in Buu & Pham, 2012, p. 114

*Reason3: A new collectivism versus traditionalism in the visual arts creates 'global' metaphors*

During this time of cultural integration, the abundance of Doi Moi artworks shows how artists were searching for their personal and artistic identity. Buu Chi depicts this in *Searching one to another* (see Figure 12), which portrays a feeling of 'senselessness' as two absurd rock shapes, which look like human torso search for each other. In using these images, the artist is expressing his feelings of confusion



and anxiety when he attempts to understand what has happened in his life. This method of expression suggests that he had no sense or clue of how culture and art were developing at the time. To portray this idea, he uses unusual hollows and shapes on the surface of each form in the painting. The two little hands appear to be trying to find each other, suggesting there is still no success to be had in searching. This artwork, produced in 2001, was exhibited at the Newcastle Museum in New South Wales, Australia, in 2002 and in the post-Doi Moi exhibition in Singapore in 2008. This painting represents an aspect of the new Vietnamese culture of collectivism, which contrasts with individualism, both of which portray issues of national identity.



**Figure 12: Buu Chi, 2001, painting, *Searching one to another*, oil on canvas**

Source: Nguyen, as cited in Buu & Pham, 2012, p. 114

*Searching one to another* shows the blindness of vision in a particular context, using hollows as a type of symbol, which, when assembled together, become a human torso. The visual forms combine to create a metaphor that questions whether or not groups and individuals should be together. No one comprehends each other because they have no logical sense of one another.

According to Kraevskaia (2008), the collective attempts to limit the individual's creativity and innovation. The contradiction of collectivism and individualism gave rise to many artworks during this period, including Buu Chi's work in 2001, when he and many other artists explored themes in relation to 'cultural pollution' in society (pp. 104–7).

These three artworks by Buu Chi provide an understanding of how the Communist Party influenced the cognitive thinking processes in the visual arts that represented Vietnamese postwar traumas. These artworks collectively serve as an example of Serig's (2006) research, which found that 'cognition does not exist without environment, social connections, feelings and emotions' (p. 229).

In conclusion, Vietnamese artworks reflect the Vietnamese cultural, political and social life of each period of history. Tam Giao plays a vital role in cultural expressions in the visual arts. By using metaphors, artists avoid direct political criticism, provide the audience with insights into experiences beyond those of familiar everyday life, and offer knowledge about Vietnamese war traumas that have affected the development of the nation. The following chapter will focus on an analysis of how feelings and emotions can be used to lead to an understanding of the different types of aesthetics, which in turn assists in understanding the artworks of different cultures, with particular reference to the artworks of Tam Giao culture.

### **Chapter 3:**

## **The Differences of Expression Between Two Groups of Artists During Doi-Moi and Post-Doi Moi in Vietnam—Aesthetic Understanding Through Feelings and Emotions**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will identify how feelings and emotions are evoked in the aesthetic contemplation of an artwork or object. The discussion of aesthetic contemplation will focus first on the notion of feeling, specifically in the sense that the viewer brings no emotions to the viewing of an object in order to fully comprehend the embodied feeling that comes from engaging with a work of art. Following Hare (1972, pp. 181–93), the second focus is on emotion, specifically that which is aroused when the embodied feeling of the work goes. Other scholars, such as Yob (1961), Hare (1972), Tillich (as cited in Yob, 1991) and Osborne (1982) have contributed to research about ‘feeling-qualities’ as embodied in art. The aesthetic experience of and cognitive interest in an artwork leads to the comprehension of feeling itself (Hare, 1972, pp. 343–9).

This chapter will also examine how the aesthetic symbol and its feeling-qualities relate to the realities that identify who we are, what we fear and how we may hope and take courage. In this study, the personal experience of existential anxiety, plus the comprehension of aesthetic symbolic creation, is regarded as a way of understanding cultures and societies in the postwar period. According to Tillich (as cited in Yob, 1991, pp. 6–7), existential anxiety can be identified in different levels of human encounters, which he calls ‘the ground of being’, ‘the power of being’, and ‘being-itself’. He also analyses the nature of being and emphasises that the arts have an indispensable role to play in revealing our existential angst and giving us some hope to express how we may find ‘the courage to be’. His research into aesthetic symbols will be used to examine the representation of anxiety found in aesthetic symbols in the Vietnamese traditional visual arts. Tillich’s symbol theory—along with the theories of the other scholars mentioned above—will be used to analyse ways of thinking in the Vietnamese traditional visual arts. This chapter will also build on and offer alternative ways of interpreting contemporary art to show how uncertainty and anxiety are expressed in the visual arts. The ways in which

Tam Giao has been used as the Vietnamese 'manner' since 1985 will be analysed, with reference to artistic expressions by two selected groups of Vietnamese artists: Doi Moi I (1985–95) and Doi Moi II (1995–2005).

When responding to a subject matter, Vietnamese artists, like other artists, represent a feeling or an emotion using their own culturally formed modes and expressions. Osborne (1982, p. 20) notes the interrelationship between the form of an artwork and the impact it has upon a viewer's emotions. He also notes that representational works of art, which portray emotional situations, such as the Late Hellenistic *Laocoon* or *The scream* by Edvard Munch, are called 'expressive' because the works portray their subjects to the extent that their nonrepresentational features contribute to the work's emotional impact. He argues that the primary function of an artwork is not to stimulate emotions but to present, display or expose the anatomy and variety of human feelings. Osborne also identifies that feeling is in some ways embodied in the work of art, and it is in the perception of the work that we perceive the embodied feeling.

### **The Embodied Feeling in a Work of Art**

Osborne's recognition of the existence of embodied feeling in a work of art prompts the following three questions:

1. How can feeling be embodied in a work of art?
2. How do different tones and shades in colours represent different levels of feeling and variations of mood?
3. How is feeling expressed, and how can it be experienced as a 'feeling' within ourselves?

### **How can feeling be embodied in a work of art?**

Osborne (1982, pp. 21–5) states that the feeling or mood that accompanies emotions and ideas is a privately accessible state of perception and is dependent on the artist's expression. The impulses to comprehend a work of art and its aesthetic affect are related to the viewer's practical life. Ducasse (as cited in Hare, 1972) and Hare (1972) recognise that the creative activities of the artist and the aesthetic experience of the viewer are matters of theoretical and cultural involvement. Therefore, the three questions above will be addressed in order to understand how to comprehend the visual arts. Key concepts such as the feeling, emotion and mood

of the viewer (and of the artwork) will also be identified to explain the aesthetic contemplation that is an essential part of perceiving the embodied knowledge in a work of art.

According to Osborne (1982, pp. 21–5), there are four main sensitivities: (1) from sad to happy, (2) from tenseness to relaxation, (3) from depression to cheerfulness and (4) from placid (serene, content) to restless (irritable, anxious). He notes that every feeling, whether in art or in life, finds its place somewhere in these sensitivities. He also distinguishes between the terms *emotion* and *feeling* as follows. *Emotion* may refer to a complex mental state, consisting of what is called an *intentional object*, which he explains is an idea of a belief or an apprehended situation, whereas a *feeling* he describes as details of mood and affective quality that we experience in connection with our emotions.

There is an important phenomenological difference between the feeling incorporated in an emotional response and the embodied feeling we perceive in works of art. To distinguish the impacts of the two types of feeling, Osborne (1982) also identifies two different circumstances in the receipt of feelings. When we respond to an insult with anger or to a threat with fear, the feeling of anger or of fear is experienced within ourselves and we have no tendency to attribute the feeling to the source of our emotion, but the feeling we perceive in a work of art is in the work and can be found nowhere else. For example, the emotional quality of an abstract painting by Franz Marc or Jackson Pollock conveys feeling directly, not inferentially as when we receive the feelings and emotions of other people through their gestures and behaviour.

Osborne (1982) claim that our experience of feeling in a work of art is to be accounted for by subconsciously perceived similarities between the aesthetic features, and by the intrinsic, intuitive quality of an artwork or an object. These feelings do not follow the logic of theoretical understanding when one appreciates a work of art. To support the claim above, Leonard and Mayer (as cited in Osborne, 1982, p. 20) explain the difference between an emotional response to aesthetic intrinsic features on the one hand and intellectual comprehension on the other. They emphasise that intellectual (or theoretical) understanding cannot interpret the new kinds and levels of feeling experienced by a viewer who uses his or her sense of understanding of intrinsic features to comprehend an artwork.

### **How do different tones and shades in colours represent different levels of feeling and variations of mood?**

The role of feeling-quality needs to be considered when appreciating a work of art. Many researchers and scholars, such as Osborne, Wollheim, Leonard and Mayer, who continue to contribute in the same context as Hare and Ducasse, focus on the theory of expression in the visual arts, and they explain the role of feeling when aesthetically contemplating a work of art. In this theory, Ducasse (as cited in Hare, p. 344) explains that the viewer should not impose his or her own feelings on the image. Free of his or her own feelings, the viewer will receive the pure embodied feeling of the artwork, which portrays its emotion(s) unimpeded by the viewer's personal mood. He also comments that if we could not free ourselves from our feelings, our experience of reading the newspaper would be traumatic indeed. The 'expression theory of art' also explores how the vast majority of subtle feelings are lower in intensity than the so-called passions and that they do not last long and do not recur as often. These feeling-qualities often appear when the viewer appreciates an artwork. Although our sense of logic encourage us to ignore these subtleties, aesthetic contemplation demands that these emotional subtleties be registered. Ducasse (as cited in Hare, 1972) gives examples in recognising 'feeling-images' when observing a work of art. He states that we need to 'listen' to the feeling-images and should not direct our attention to our own feelings (Ducasse, as cited in Hare, 1972, p. 343). He also explains that there is nothing easy about registering the difference between the feeling-images aroused by seeing one shade of red and by seeing another slightly different shade of red. Each shade of colour, or change of line, tone or pattern, gives an individual feeling, or emotional 'taste'. Ducasse (as cited in Hare, 1972, p. 344) also points out that it is only when we have a cognitive interest in the source of an aesthetic experience that we can comprehend the feeling itself, that a feeling-image leads us to experience the feeling of the artwork. For example, if one knows nothing of Christianity or of Western humanistic traditions, one would not comprehend Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* as a feeling-image in the Sistine Chapel.

### **How is feeling expressed, and how can it be experienced as a 'feeling' within ourselves?**

The nature of the visual arts involves expressions and meanings in depicting the human condition and identifies an existential awareness. Feelings and emotions will

be discussed further in this chapter to explain how the visual arts can express feelings and how those feelings are experienced personally. Tillich (as cited in Yob, 1991, p. 6) analyses the human situation and the anxiety and fear experienced in our daily lives. He classifies the human feeling into three levels, which he calls (1) 'the ground of being'—concern about our own mortality; (2) 'the power of being'—inquiry into the nature of being and (3) 'being-itself'—the search for self-identity. The last level, being-itself, determines how individuals and societies are shaped. Tillich also explains that the visual arts perform three interrelated functions to express human concerns, such as our existential angst and how we find our courage. With the first function, the visual arts express humankind's fear of reality. With the second function, the visual arts transform the meanings of life into symbolic form. For example, Byzantine or early Gothic pictures are not merely decorative but symbolic of the heavenly spheres. With the third function, the visual arts anticipate the possibilities of perfection and its distortion. The visual arts also express a kind of visual harmony in the wider context of conflict or, in effect, courage in the experience of anxiety or meaninglessness. Tillich also explores the notion that the visual arts have always had a particular affinity with religion, and he explains that artworks can represent or express the transcendent realities to which religion attends. He also provides a theory of symbols and believes that if we understand symbolic functioning we can comprehend, without distortion, the meaning of both verbal language and nonverbal symbol systems.

### **The Theory of Aesthetic Symbols**

According to Tillich's theory (as cited in Yob, 1991, pp. 6–11), two different categories of symbols are identified: the first category is the 'sign' such as a red traffic light or mathematical symbols; the second category is the 'aesthetic symbol' or 'symbolic material' that can take many pictorial forms. Aural symbols relate to elements of music. The functions of a symbol are variously to stand for, refer to, point to, denote or represent.

Tillich's theory of symbols and his analysis of the functions of aesthetic symbols are detailed below (as cited in Yob, 1991, pp. 11–15) and will be used to analyse some types of expression of anxiety in traditional Vietnamese art. He proposes that aesthetic symbols must be evaluated according to different standards than those used to evaluate a literal work of art. Tillich also emphasises that the characteristic of an aesthetic symbol cannot be invented; rather, it grows out of the collective

unconscious and functions only when it is accepted by the subconscious dimension of our being. The term *collective unconscious* can be explained as a series of creative processes performed by artists who produce works reflecting their environments. Collective unconscious is socially rooted and socially accepted. He also notes that if the relationship between community and society changes significantly, the symbol ceases to exist because it does not 'say' anything anymore. Tillich's theory of symbols is convincing in its recognition of the complexity of symbols that could change the viewer's interpretations. This may allow for the changes and different situations in our lives. These features will be discussed in the following sections.

To comprehend the aesthetic form and content of an artwork, it is important to understand that the relationship between feeling, emotion and aesthetic contemplation is important in comprehending the embodied feeling from a work of art. This approach also helps when one wishes to appreciate the art of different periods or cultures. An understanding of aesthetic symbols can also be used as a tool for understanding the political, social and cultural changes depicted in a work of art. Aesthetic symbols provide insights into changes in different societies and in ways of expression. Using Tillich's theory of aesthetic symbols and Ducasse's theory of expression in art, I will now demonstrate how the traditional Vietnamese visual arts function to express war traumas.

### **Representation of feelings and emotions in the Vietnamese traditional war art context**

Vietnam experienced 100 years of civil war during the seventeenth century (see Chapter 2) when the Trinh and Nguyen lords, who had split the Le dynasty, initiated many wars aimed at increasing their power; simultaneously, royal authority was weakened and unable to control the government. The visual arts in Vietnam, especially Buddhist art, changed its expression in this period; the typical pure Buddhist meditational representation changed to a Taoist-Buddhism hybrid, a mix between meditation and a summoning of the spirits. About 90 per cent of the Vietnamese population believed in Buddhism and Taoism in the Dai Viet period. As mentioned in the Literature Review, Buddhist art was popular in every village and Vietnamese community (Nguyen & Le, 2012).



As a result of the Ly dynasty in the eleventh to twelfth centuries, the 'Buddhist' Dai Viet became a powerful nation. It was a peaceful and independent nation. The sculpture of the Ly reaches an ideal harmony of the 'golden mean' (Phan, 1997a).

Buddhist art and its system of symbolism is a major part of the Vietnamese traditional visual arts. The changes in the modes of expression in Buddhist art between the Ly dynasty of the eleventh to twelfth centuries and the Le-Trinh dynasty of the seventeenth century demonstrate the new emphasis on the visual impact of the political-social climate in works of art. The Ly dynasty produced Buddha statues (see Figures 13 and 14) that reflected a stable, peaceful period; most are depicted in deep meditation with a calm smile, which represents the spirit of joyful emotions. However, the Buddhist symbol during the Le-Trinh dynasty 'performs' its subject matter by creating more-mysterious statues through a complex structure that portrays conflicting aspects, resulting from the political and social complexity during that century (Phan, 1997a, p. 118).



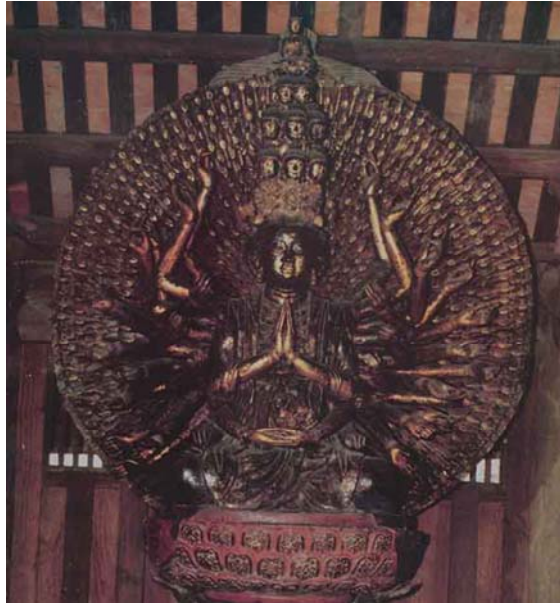
**Figure 13: Unknown artist, twelfth century, sculpture, *Vajrapani Buddha's head* (section), stone**

Source: Phan, 1997a, p. 67



**Figure 14: Unknown artist, twelfth century, sculpture, *Vajrapani Buddha's head*, stone**

Source: Phan, 1997a, p. 67



**Figure 15: Unknown artist, seventeenth century,  
*Thousand eyes and thousand hands Buddha*,  
wood**

Source: Phan, 1997a, p. 64

During the Le-Trinh dynasty, artists turned the Buddhist symbol of meditative calm into a kind of 'symbolic deity' evoking a desire, or a feeling of grief in response to the long civil war at that time. The statue known as *Phat ba nghìn mat nghìn tay* (*Thousand eyes and thousand hands Buddha*) (see Figure 15), which was created in 1656 in the But Thap Pagoda in Ha Bac, Vietnam, is an example (Phan, 1997a). The statue can be viewed as a complex design of Vietnamese Buddhist art with possible frames of reference to Buddhist, Taoist, social and political purposes. It conveys disquieting emotions. On the literal level (primary subject A) of this artwork, the Buddhist symbol is created for the ordinary people for the purpose of prayer when they are in danger. A Buddhist gesture has been created using complex features, such as the repetition of hand patterns. The statue consists of four parts—namely, the Buddha heads; the Buddha's body, including 36 hands coming out from the body; the pedestal for the statue; and the Buddhist tree (Bodhi tree) leaf that has been sculpted and placed behind the Buddha statue. The sculpted leaf, which faces the viewer, is covered with a thousand human hand palms, an eye on each palm. All of the palms have been sculpted from the centre of the leaf in such a way that each points away from the centre towards the edge of this huge leaf, spanning 360 degrees.

The seated Buddha is depicted in a typical Taoist-Buddhist position. The smaller heads are arranged in vertical layers, facing in different directions, on top of the main Buddha's head, which portrays a meditating Buddha. The faces are without emotion. In this aesthetic symbol, the *Thousand eyes and thousand hands Buddha* statue uses hand motifs to portray its theme. Using the religious form of hand palms, the 36 hands, with their mysterious reproductive powers, actively come out from the Buddha's body. These active hands and the hands on the Bodhi tree leaf suggest an interrelated purpose.

The interrelated purpose will be discussed with reference to the design of two different hand and palm patterns in this artwork. The 36 hands are dynamically organised in circular movements, giving the viewer a structure of embodied feelings. The cultural responses to these hands gesturing skywards are feelings of dejection, melancholy and anxiety. The *Thousand eyes and thousand hands Buddha* statue may remind the viewer of the statue in Rotterdam, *In memory of a destroyed city* (see Figure 16), produced by Zadkine. In this artwork, which symbolises the violence and destruction of World War II, Zadkine uses arms gesturing towards the sky to express anger and strong emotions (Symonds, Portley & Phillips, 1972, p. 147). These two works belong to a type of art in which artists use their imagination, along with their use of their knowledge of collective memory and the collective unconscious, to produce aesthetic symbols or artworks. This type of art requires the viewer to find relationships, analogues and configurations from which they can comprehend or appreciate the work of art. *In memory of a destroyed city* expresses directly the feelings of anger using a cubist style to represent post-World War II European emotions. The artist evokes common feelings that live within everyone. In contrast, the *Thousand eyes and thousand hands Buddha* statue indirectly depicts the same traumatic theme by using a religious context. It represents the context of anxiety and trauma, using typical Buddhist expressions through the repetition of hand, palm and eye patterns.



**Figure 16: Zadkine, 1953–54, sculpture,  
*In Memory of a destroyed city*, bronze,  
Rotterdam**

Source: Symonds, Portley & Phillips, 1972, p.

147

The viewer's response to the *Thousand eyes and thousand hands Buddha* statue will be one of three responses and will depend on the cultural position of the viewer. The first type of viewer is one who prays to the Buddha. This viewer often brings his or her own personal matters when viewing this statue. This type of viewer is looking at the mysterious power or magical opportunities the image conveys. In this case, the 36 hands and the Bodhi tree leaf with a thousand palms and eyes, provides the viewer with meaningful support through the calm, seated Buddha who, with his hands, gestures help. When emotion is aroused, the embodied feelings of the work dissipate, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Indeed, the statue as a piece of art becomes a magic image for this type of Buddhist believer. The Buddhist viewer gives meanings to the statue and, at this stage, the feeling-image subjectively becomes advice or a message.

The second type of viewer is one who knows nothing about Buddhism, its theories or culture. This viewer uses their aesthetic contemplation to recognise their own

feelings embodied in this artwork. Their aesthetic experience and their cognitive interest lead them to comprehend the work. When observing the work, this type of viewer would see the thousand palms and eyes as patterns that reinforce the active 36 hands with different movements in different directions. The 36 carved hands suggest an ideal of beauty through their gestures, thereby eliciting in the viewer a range of feelings, from tenseness to relaxation, as identified in Osborne's (1982) four parameters, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The hand symbols lead the viewer's eye to the Bodhi tree leaf with the palms and eyes looking back at the viewer. The 'chorus' patterns of palms and hands prompt the emotion the viewer's embodied feelings in the work of art may hold, according to either the first sensitivity (from sad to happy) or the second sensitivity (from depressed to cheerful) (Osborne, 1982, pp. 21–5). The embodied feelings in this work of art rely on the composition and arrangement of the gesturing hands and palms, which reveal the cross-cultural human experience of expressing emotional meaning through the use of hands. The gestures of the 36 hands suggest complex emotions, which become meaningful depending on the viewer's cultural position.

The third type of viewer is the artist, who is considered a practical, knowledgeable, creative viewer. This type of viewer can use their collective memory along with their collective unconscious view to comprehend this work of art featuring the Buddhist concept. This viewer can understand the way in which the work is expressive. This helps in understanding the embodied feeling of the artwork. In short, the characteristic patterns (hand, palm and eye) depict powerful complex emotions in the embodied feelings of this work of art to this audience.

In sum, the metaphorical rounded Bodhi tree leaf symbol and the layout of the thousand hands and eyes are nonrepresentational features relating to the Buddhist concept of human life. (This concept refers to the circle of life, *Sinh, Quy, Tu, Quy*, combined with the Buddhist theory of cause and effect, which are both mentioned in the Literature Review). The positioning of the 36 hands coming from the Buddha's body actively expresses the inner mourning of those who pray to the Buddha. The patterns in this work incorporate mainly hand gestures, and the composition reveals complex emotions. The viewer experiences aesthetic contemplation in comprehending the embodied feelings—from sad to happy, from tenseness to relaxation and from depression to cheerfulness—that are created in the work. This statue, produced when the nation was suffering a severe crisis, has continued to be very popular for religious purposes, even today.

Throughout the history of the visual arts, the diversity of expressions of feeling and emotion embodied in a work of art has been 'connected to the powerful forces of social modernity' (Smith, 2011, p. 8). To understand the diversity, particularly important given that it is the key characteristic of contemporary art in the world today, one needs to recognise that cultural symbols and cultural beliefs still bring into consciousness an awareness of deep motivations. According to Stephen (1999, p. 722), symbols often both reveal and conceal and usually hint at what lies behind them. These observations are also relevant in linking the traditional and contemporary art of each region today.

### **Global art and its impacts on anxiety: Vietnamese traditional artistic expressions in contemporary art after 1985**

Contemporary Vietnamese art in the twenty-first century has developed from postmodern art that uses figurative modes and rejects traditional cultural theory. I have discussed how the traditional art of metaphorical expression is in a state of transition. Artists are now seeking modes of cosmopolitan connection and cooperation. Smith (2011) proposes that contemporary art is now becoming, for the first time in history, an art of the world. However, artists' various responses continue to be formed according to their level of connectedness to the economic centres of mass production, marketing and the use of this context.

Indeed, the visual arts have had a strong impact on the distribution of political, economic and cultural power around the world since the mid-twentieth century. Artists' works, as the obvious products of particular cultures, are regarded as international artistic exchanges and part of global culture. Smith (2011, pp. 12–13) notes that the great modern cities, such as London, New York and Paris, were capitals of the cultural and arts revolution. He also explains that geopolitics was dominated by competition through free-market orientation. The visual arts can also be seen framed through the regime of the communist government in China, which seeks strategic influence throughout the rest of the world. These groups also strived to attract intellectuals (including artists) to their belief systems or ideologies. Smith (2011) also analyses global art movements, which, through the use of new technologies, promoted the growth of economic, political and cultural networks of power that now reach throughout the world. Technology influences all new media art forms through the use of commercial and official mass media, which have had an

enormous impact on the world, visualizing capabilities for all of us. According to Smith's research, every nation is questioning its sense of identity relative to that of other nations and is experiencing severe disruption to its internal, community-defining processes. He notes that artists are representing these energies and anxieties in their art. Undeniably, the visual arts are moving towards an uncertain, unpredictable future.

Smith (2011) recognises that the mass media in consumer societies influences the shaping of the artist's subjectivity, but it is also much concerned with expressing conflicting temporalities in a persuasive narrative and is, in turn, potentially problematic in its operations (p. 299). The impact of the media on people in the United States is exemplified by a number of young artists, such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, who were inspired by street and subway graffiti in the East Village in New York. Haring drew his quasi-human graphic characters on any surface he could find on the streets. He often analysed the power of media such as television, the pursuit of money, the joy of homosexuality and the threat of AIDS, which he then presented in his graffiti art. Haring died from AIDS at the age of 32. Basquiat's *Untitled* is a self-portrait (see Appendix 16) depicting the racial and social conflicts of the modern city. In this self-portrait, Basquiat's head resembles a trophy on a stick. Basquiat died at the age of 27 from a drug overdose.

Generally, fears of psychic disturbance result from causes beyond our control, beyond our ability to prepare for, and even to anticipate, through the purposes of the mass media. Over the last two decades, the causes of trauma were a central subject for artists, such as Damien Hirst, who consistently works with the subject of trauma. One of Hirst's best-known works is *The physical impossibility of death in the mind of someone living*, 1991 (see Appendix 17). In this artwork, he presents the shark as if it was alive and in its habitat. This work evokes the fear of unexpected attack, of instant death coming from a great distance, from a 'nowhere' that is all around us.

Tracey Emin, a London artist, sources her subject matter from her history as an abused child of immigrant parents. Her work entitled *My bed*, 1988, displays the physical characteristics of a confused life (see Appendix 18). It registers the struggle by members of the artist's generation to achieve recognition in what they understand to be a conventional, corporatised political reaction towards societies.

Artists who belong to the two main groups (the United States and Western Europe) seek the specialised section of the market for their interests. While these two groups use postmodern strategies, such as displacement, pastiche, allusion and intertextuality, the third group (Chinese artists) use late modernist forms that employ different strategies, according to Smith (2011). Since 1978, Chinese artists have been representing their subjective responses towards their society after the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). There is, for the first time, a policy allowing artists freedom in their art activities (Tran, 2007, p. 319). Two art movements quickly emerged, Cynical Realism and Political Pop. The earlier movement is exemplified by Fang Lijun's deadpan painting entitled *Series two No.1*, 1991–92, comprising groups of absurd facial expressions (see Appendix 20). The later movement was instituted by Wang Guangyi's *Great criticism* series in which propaganda posters from the Cultural Revolution are scattered with the logos and brand names of the international companies then appearing in China as the nation gave itself over to consumerism (see Appendix 19).

Artist Yue Minjun's *Execution* artwork presents his opinion of Chinese policy; his *One child a family* reflects the Political Pop art movement. His art shows strong influence from Goya's *The third of May*, 1814, and Manet's *Execution of Maximilian*, 1868–69. Minjun uses his self-portraits to more directly criticise government policy. This use of art as a form of criticism was rare in China previously (see Appendix 21). All his figures are assembled as if for a rock-and-roll performance and have fixed false smiles; all are self-portraits of the artist.

A central paradox in China is that since the advent of Western postmodernism, many artists have reacted by embracing the core values of individualistic humanism but in a 'Chinese' manner. This demonstrates a mix, which suggests Chinese artists will continue to blend the theme of human behaviour with the complexities of China's engagement with globalisation.

This diversity of artworks from different cultures has represented global contemporary art in its most obvious, controversial and celebrated manifestations, especially in the early decades of the twenty-first century when global art provided every opportunity to 'creators' who wanted to show their individual ways of artistic expression. Smith (2011, p. 82) also notes that international contemporary art is highly diverse in its modes. Creators approach their emotions in different ways according to their specific culture. The visual arts have no universal style or shared



content. Indeed, contemporary art has been undergoing a period of uncertainty, reflecting the changes in geopolitical and social regions during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Similarly, contemporary art in Vietnam is no longer simply concerned with traditional expressions. It presents historical and social issues that affect human conditions in a Viet-international art language.

In Vietnam the visual arts entered a new phase after 1975, ushering in a revival in the visual arts scene and market after the Vietnam war. The arts community grew, and artists faced the dual challenges of their postwar traumas (including a battle with the conservative art group who wanted to control and keep the visual arts for Communist Party purposes) and the international art brought into their environment. In research conducted by Fan (2008) around these issues, she observes that contemporary Vietnamese artists have adapted and extended their creative expression to many different subject matters that were never depicted in traditional art prior to 1980. There are four themes in the new art of Vietnam: individualism, cultural identity, reminiscence and transformation. Buu Chi's *Blind man playing the monochord* (see Appendix 22) demonstrates the theme of individualism. This angst-filled painting shows a blind man passionately playing a traditional Vietnamese stringed instrument known as a monochord. According to Fan (2007), the artist projected himself and his emotions into the painting and allowed the work to be open to psychological interpretation (p. 47).

The theme of cultural identity is embodied in Nguyen Nhu Y's *Sculpture installation*, 1999, which represents a sense of spirituality (see Appendix 23). The artist carved the wood directly, without sketches. His sculptures are totemic images inspired by the primitive sculpture of the Gia-rai ethnic minority.

The theme of reminiscence is found in Dang Xuan Tiep's *The return*, 1993, which refers to a folk aesthetic style to represent his childhood memory of the war when he and his family were relocated to the countryside to avoid the bombings in the city (see Appendix 24). A modernist art style combined with Vietnamese folk art aesthetic elements (motifs and compositional methods) has been chosen to portray an individual identity in his artwork (Fan, 2007, p. 122).

The theme of transformation is acknowledged in Dang Xuan Hoa's *Human object No. 1*, 1994, which relates to Vietnamese cultural signs and traditions along with the creation of forms of contemporary expressions (see Appendix 25). *Human object*

*No. 1* conveys Dang Xuan Hoa's unique Vietnamese sensibility. According to Fan (2007, pp. 137–41), Dang Xuan Hoa emphasises traditional values as well as human presence, its functions and uses; his artwork shows advancements in technique, style and approach.

In her research on the Vietnamese visual arts in 2007, Taylor (2007) acknowledges that postwar artists have presented anti-traditional art styles, themes and expressions in the form of avant-garde modern experiments in mixed-media performance within contemporary art practice since 1975. She also discusses how the development of the Vietnamese visual arts following the rise of experimental performance culture in Hanoi's alternative spaces after the Doi Moi Policy. The following section will examine the extent to which traditional artistic expression influences Vietnamese postwar artists and how postwar artists have created a revolution using anti-conventional art rather than anti-traditional art styles. Two groups of artists, Doi Moi I and Doi Moi II, will be used to examine how these artists value their culture and how global art and its social issues affect their artworks and the artists themselves. The examination will also consider how these two groups of artists value the expressive capacity of the traditional visual arts and assess to what extent international art markets support these artists in their new ways of expression.

### **Doi Moi I, 1985–95**

After 1975, artists from the north and south met, and together developed the Vietnamese visual arts when the country was united. Hanoi artists had been trained under the traditional French academic system, while Ho Chi Minh City artists had developed their visual arts techniques at either the Gia Dinh Drawing School or were self-taught individuals. However, both were influenced by Western modern art as discussed in the Literature Review.

Nguyen (2010, p. 130) notes after the Doi Moi Policy was initiated, Doi Moi I artists involved in the Vietnam Fine Arts Association embraced new visual arts practices that have flooded into Vietnam since 1975. They were all young artists, who for the first time had won leadership positions in the association for a five-year period, giving them the opportunity to work against the conservative group within the association (as discussed in the Literature Review).

Nguyen Quan, an art critic and an artist, became the chief director of the Vietnam Fine Arts Association. Three other significant artists in Doi Moi I are Dang Thi Khue, who also became a member of Parliament; Luong Xuan Doan, an artist who later became the Minister for Arts; and Dao Minh Tri, who was the director of the Vietnam Fine Arts Association in Ho Chi Minh City. This group of artists stood up for themselves and for the talented younger generation of artists. They began to have regular art shows and introduced the idea of an art exchange program involving local artists as well as inviting Western artists in residence. They also found new markets in Vietnam and other countries for young talented artists. When looking back on their hard work and achievements nearly 20 years later, Nguyen (2010, p. 131) comments, '*Doi Moi* is a long process in visual arts and it shows tremendously in the reformation through its events. It is still going and moving forwards'.

### **The artists of Doi Moi I and their works of art**

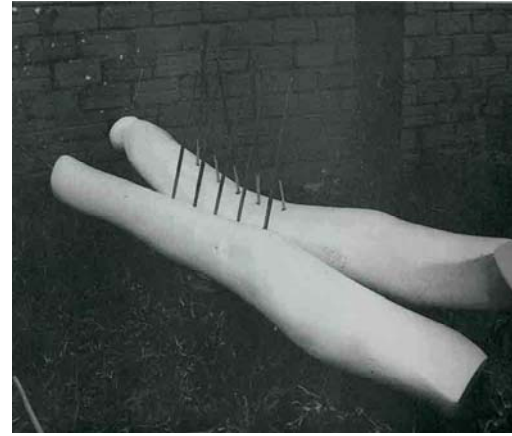
The artists of Doi Moi I focus on presenting personal postwar themes. There was a complex mix of relief following the horrible battles of the war and of excitement about a new freedom of expression. In addition, the power of mass media and new technology enabled the development of networks that reshaped the artists' points of view.

Nguyen Quan, an art historian, painter and leading visual arts critic, used his leadership to promote artists and contemporary art in Vietnam. He studied mathematics at the University of Merseberg, East Germany, between 1965 and 1971. His current artwork themes (1985–2012) concern the narrative of his everyday life (Le 2012, pers. comm., 23 December). According to Phan and Tran (1997), Nguyen Quan came from an intellectual Confucian background, and his education in Germany influenced his art (pp. 89 & 166–7). Throughout his career, Nguyen Quan's artworks have never shown any traditional aesthetics. Two artworks with the same title, *The white death* (one a sculpture, the other a painting), provide an example of the global art ideas that have influenced him. Both works portray his emotions after his father died. In the 1994 painting and the 1996 sculpture, Nguyen Quan has used the same motifs, but he has experimented with the use of different media to express the same emotion. He has used a surrealist painting style to depict *The white death* (see Figure 17a).



**Figure 17a: Nguyen Quan, 1994, painting,**  
***The white death*, oil on canvas**

Source: Phan & Tran, 1997, p. 89



**Figure 17b: Nguyen Quan, 1996,**  
**sculpture, *The white death*, jack-**  
**fruit wood, bamboo**

Source: Phan & Tran, 1997, p. 166

The sculpture (see Figure 17b) has been carved to maintain its own natural forms carefully selected from blocks of jackfruit wood, which were then painted white. Nguyen Quan attached some bamboo sticks to the jackfruit block, which represents a body, to symbolise either incense sticks, which represent death, or arrows, which represent brutal feelings.

Nguyen Quan has used a contemporary assemblage method, and he displays this sculpture in his garden—a natural setting. The method of his expression is a type of personal anti-formalism, which privileges his emotional view of the everyday world and the people around him. The sculpture shows this through the artist's personal carving and sculptural techniques. The two blocks of wood painted in white convey the artist's purposes powerfully, echoing modern expressive techniques but remaining intensely personal.

Dang Thi Khue, a successful female artist in Doi Moi I, influenced many younger artists in the early Doi Moi period. She has a strong Confucian family background, which was revealed in 2012 in an interview about how she presented her art. During the interview, she also showed her father's poem, which she said taught her to be a good person through its Confucian influences. She further explained that achievement is an essential outcome of the Confucian outlook. This attitude is found in any traditional Confucian family in Vietnam and China. In her earlier work in the 1970s, she used a traditional Confucian approach to artmaking (see Chapter 1), and

her 1980s works show her new way of Confucian expression. The following description illustrates her Confucian manner and how it has changed in her new art practice ( Le 2013, pers. comm., 11 January).

The artwork *The Journey*, 1989, uses three empty bowls against a background of heavy red and green colours (see Figure 18). In the painting, the three empty rice bowls are portrayed in a jumbled, slanting position, their awkwardness representing the harsh journey of each individual. The bowls remain unbroken, however—a testament to their dignity.

In the background of *The Journey*, the red and green create a solemn atmosphere, suggesting a heroic Confucian manner ( Le 2013, pers. comm., 11 January). The rice bowl is a significant food holder, and it has been used as part of a long tradition in Vietnam. A conceptual structure that uses empty rice bowls to depict the harsh journey of Vietnamese individuals gives the audience an image of every Vietnamese who ever went through a difficult period. In her composition of unbroken rice bowls 'behaving' heroically, Dang Thi Khue expresses the inner meaning of Vietnamese historical reality using a Confucian metaphor.

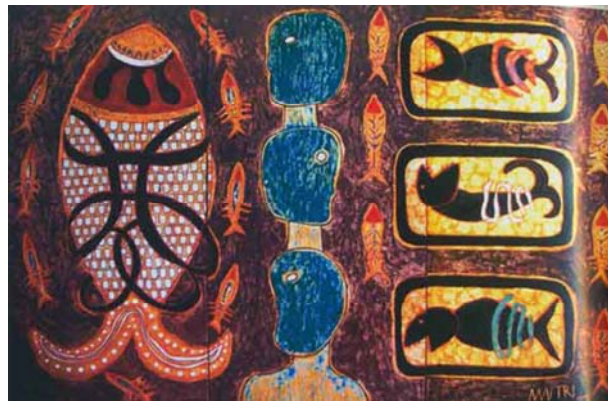


**Figure 18: Dang Thi Khue, 1989, painting, *The journey*, oil on canvas**

Source: Dang, 2003

Dao Minh Tri, another Doi Moi I artist, experimented with the postmodern figurative mode very early in this period. He often uses fish forms for most of his large lacquer (a traditional material) paintings. Dao Minh Tri is the son of famous intellectual

parents, who profoundly influenced him in his childhood. One of his personal characteristics is a sense of humour in all circumstances, and this is reflected in his art. This characteristic sense of humour is taken from both folk art and Vietnamese literature. His artworks often give humorous pleasure to the viewer even though he depicts some serious political or social issues, as in the painting *My fish* (see Figure 19).



**Figure 19: Dao Minh Tri, 1999, lacquer painting, *My fish***

Source: Nguyen Quan, 1997, p. 220

The fish figures in *My fish* are set in tiny rectangular blocks or tanks and are presented facing in the same direction, though all of them want to escape their situation as suggested by their gestures. The viewer may enjoy the entertaining way in which the fish are depicted and the vibrant colours emerging from the gold and organic lacquer-painting materials. The gestures of the fish indicate different situations, such as being in danger or being under attack. However, all of the fish objects are unable to escape the thick, solid, black rectangular tanks. Dao Minh Tri's metaphor derived from the fish symbol provides a shared experience of traditional Vietnamese culture, while his contemporary lived experience creates a new contemporary metaphorical expression in the form of fish.

In an interview in 2012, Dao Minh Tri explained that he used fish figures in this series of artworks to portray the isolation of Vietnam and the atmosphere in the visual arts before 1975. He also wanted to express the frustration experienced by himself and other artists who were still having difficulty with the communist authorities during the Doi Moi period. Dao Minh Tri consistently explores traditional art sources to support his postmodern art ideas, using traditional materials and processes, such as lacquer-painting materials and folk art elements, but he explores and transcends their aesthetic elements to suit his contemporary work. Dao Minh Tri

has developed a system of formalising his sensory perceptions to represent his expressions of trauma (Le 2013, pers. comm., 14 January).

## **Doi Moi II, 1995–2005**

The Doi Moi II artists show diverse talents, a determination to explore new perspectives in art and a refusal to countenance any commercial art enterprise. Due to their committed creative expressions, the visual arts in Vietnam entered a new phase in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Since 1986, this group of five artists in Hanoi has continued to make an impression through their paintings, jointly exhibiting their artworks regularly. The art critic Duong Tuong named them the 'Gang of Five' (as mentioned in the Literature Review). Like the Gang of Five, 10 avant-garde artists in Ho Chi Minh City broke away from traditional art with work that used abstract figurative expression. The artists of each group, in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, frequently exhibited their works together. After 1977, the members of the Gang of Five moved away from each other (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December; Le 2013, pers. comm., 4 January) because they had found that their new experiments (such as painting, installation and performing arts) could not be successfully exhibited together. However, after 1990, their artistic creations made a powerful impression in national and international markets, exhibitions and auctions. Following the Gang of Five artists in Hanoi, Le Quang Ha, Dinh Y Nhi, Nguyen Nhu Y and other talented emerging artists were quickly recognised in the international markets in London, Singapore, Hong Kong and the United States. These Doi Moi II artists had opportunities to visit and see the art of different cultures. These artists work in different mediums, in opposition to the Vietnamese conservative 'colonial art' in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (Nguyen, 2010).

The Vietnamese visual arts in the 1990s began to receive strong support from the burgeoning specialist markets of several international art organisations. The Plum Blossom Gallery in Hong Kong opened the first show of 15 well-known Vietnamese artists, naming the exhibition *Uncorked soul*. Salon Natasha in Hanoi featured works by other emerging Vietnamese artists. Having such international support was a positive boost for the visual arts in Vietnam and gave Vietnamese artists the opportunity to explore what might constitute art in Vietnam. In Christie's 2008 auction, Dang Xuan Hoa became one of the top 30 South-East Asian artists.

## The artists of Doi Moi II and their works of art

In 1996, Dang Xuan Hoa, the top artist of the Gang of Five, had the opportunity to work in the United States as an artist-in-residence in New York. He is the only child from a working-class family. For 30 years he lived with his family in a very basic house (my classmates and I visited his family in 1979). During my interview with him in 2012, Dang Xuan Hoa said, 'I loved drawing and loved colours when I was a child'. He also spoke about how he was shocked by many great artworks he saw in New York when he was an artist-in-residence. He revealed that he felt anxious being an international artist after successfully marketing his artworks, which continue to appreciate in value. He said in an interview with Findlay (2008) that his figurative still life is a metaphor for Vietnamese life (p. 108). His series of nine artworks entitled *A circle of life* was completed before he was considered one of the top 30 South-East Asian artists (see Appendixes 26 & 27).

Dang Xuan Hoa currently uses raw unmixed colours in most of his artworks, which, when first encountered, creates strong visual excitement for the viewer. He explains that he loves to use raw colours and that when composing his works he tries to combine them carefully. This pictorial element has been traditionally used in folk art to depict Vietnamese customs, and he explores it because he believes it has the ability to communicate well to Vietnamese audiences today. He also explains that the colours can 'speak' for the artist's emotions. He notes that Vietnamese traditional art is a rich and powerful resource for contemporary aesthetic exploration. He confirms that the series of nine works entitled *A circle of life* is a narrative of his, his family's and the community's struggles during the postwar period. In *A circle of life*, Dang Xuan Hoa carefully studies how ancient art expresses feelings through the use of traditional motifs, and, in particular, he examines Vietnamese traditional compositional space. He explains that he can recognise different ways of expression using the same motifs in different centuries in Vietnamese ancient art (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December).





**Figure 20: Dang Xuan Hoa, 2007, painting, *A circle of life*, Christie's**

Source: Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December

Serig (2006, p. 244) identifies how, through the use of emotions and feelings as part of metaphorical thinking, artists are enabled to be creative. In addition, he observes that artists think conceptually and innovate through the creation of visual metaphors. Dang Xuan Hoa is an example of this type of art practitioner. In his artworks, his creative thinking rearranges the objects of his reflection, his social interactions and his family relationships. In the artwork *A circle of life* (see Figure 20), the first painting in the series of the same name, he has used several Buddhist symbols combined with images of his family. This work pays particular attention to how positive and negative space works in figurative representations. The positive shapes are a combination of modern facial expressions and traditional wrestling figures arranged under a traditional Vietnamese sedan chair. These positive shapes not only capture the viewer's attention but also give the viewer an impression of current Vietnamese society. This complex conceptual structure of visual metaphors is based on the artist's practice and his creative ability to effectively compose with multiple symbols using spatial composition. Dang Xuan Hoa's works can lead to new understandings of Vietnamese expression.

Tran Luong is another significant Doi Moi II artist who is also a member of the Gang of Five. His work features installation and performance art. Tran Luong's father is a hobby artist-photographer who influenced Tran Luong when he was a child. During his childhood, Tran Luong's parents taught him the basics of using a camera. This later became his career after 1985. As a teenager, Tran Luong worked hard to be

accepted into the Communist Youth League because his family was neither working class nor members of the Communist Party. This caused a feeling of anxiety for him. Due to his culturally flexible background, when the global art movement flooded Vietnam after 1986, he decided to work on performance and media art. Tran Luong started to move away from the Gang of Five; in 1986, he became a performance artist and later developed his media art. *Red scarf* is one of his performance works from 1990. The red scarf is a symbol of communist culture, and for Tran Luong, it represents the expectations of the Vietnamese Communist Youth League when he was a teenager. The performance of *Red scarf* involves both the audience and the performer. Tran Luong allows the audience to whip his body using a red scarf until his body is covered in red marks. In this performance, Tran Luong wants to show how hurt he was as a result of being a Communist Youth Leaguemember, and in front of the audience he both represents and relives the brutal feelings from his childhood memories. As a result, he shows how communist social culture influenced his artistic expression. In another of his performance works entitled *A rice man*, Tran Luong covers himself in rice to question individual identity in Vietnam. He asks 'Who am I?' and 'Am I an authentic 'rice' Vietnamese man or a 'white' person, today?' The symbolic image played by Tran Luong as a 'rice' performer combines global performance art with a specific Vietnamese cultural metaphorical expression that uses rice as the subject matter to establish his theme. Tran Luong wants to share his concerns with the Vietnamese audience (Le 2013, pers. comm., 4 January).

Le Quang Ha is a Doi Moi II artist and a young symbolist artist who, according to the art critic Nguyen (2010), chooses a different way of expression in his artwork. He enrolled at the Young Visual Arts Pioneer Club in Hanoi in 1970 when he was 13 years old. After 1986, he began to use a figurative mode, challenging the viewer by using scary figures that seem to 'shout' at the audience. According to Nguyen (2010), Le Quang Ha brings his confusing, traumatic subject into a visual arts paradigm that was often gentle and calm in its traditional visual conventions as portrayed in various subject matters. Nguyen (2010) also points out that Le Quang Ha's artworks both reflect his personal traumas and confront the socio-economic issues and changes that have occurred in Vietnam in recent years.



**Figure 21: Le Quang Ha, 2007, painting, *The dictator*, oil on canvas**

Source: Fan, 2008, p. 146, details  
see Figure 15.

Fan (2008, p. 187) comments that Le Quang Ha uses symbolic and figurative methods to present his shocking imagery and that his work seeks to express his interest in humanity. This is evident in his work *The dictator* (see Figure 21). In this painting, machinery depicted in a Western realist art style is mixed with seventeenth-century traditional religious Vietnamese art. He uses layers in the composition to present his theme and create this hybrid. His figurative images describe the effects of the modernisation that he and his generation are experiencing. This artist highlights the negative consequences of the change in socio-economic circumstances—as revealed in this cultural hybrid—and how those consequences affect his environment and his expression of the human condition. *The dictator* affects the Vietnamese viewer through the use of the thousand eyes and thousand hands symbol with the additional metallic effects expressed in a mechanical style. Both artworks express similar feelings of anxiety. Le Quang Ha, however, uses metal hands that actively communicate with the viewer, while in the *Thousand eyes and thousand hands Buddha* (see Figure 15) the hands religiously express their feelings towards the Buddha. Part of the value of Le Quang Ha's strong expression lies in his ability to arouse a new emotion by using the thousand eyes and thousand hands symbol and injecting the old metaphor with new life.

During the period 1990 to 2005, figurative art in Vietnam developed into a powerful vehicle for artists to express their opinions or emotions. In Hanoi, numerous artists

used figurative modes in diverse ways to portray their selected subject matters, which ranged from the individual through to social and cultural contexts. In Ho Chi Minh City, a number of older artists consistently developed their abstract art to become figurative abstractionists. Vietnamese contemporary art became embodied by totally new subject matters, using new ways to express and explore unconventional traditional materials suited to the selected themes. As a result of the fundamental changes in Vietnam's social, economic and political life and the importing of ideas from the international art world, contemporary artists have inherited a daunting complexity.

To sum up, three significant factors influenced Vietnam's visual arts to enter a new phase during the period 1985 to 2005. First, artists had the freedom to access international visual arts practice, allowing them to see the visual arts of the whole world or so-called global art. Second, technology enhanced mass media and communications, providing Vietnamese postwar artists with diverse opportunities for artistic experimentation with materials. Third, postwar artists carried their dual anxieties: suffering from war traumas and from the impact of global art provided to them through the mass media.

Postwar artists in Vietnam quickly experimented, creating their art by following global and postmodern artistic ideas and concentrating on figurative modes and theories while still relying on traditional artistic media to embody their artworks. The recognition of perception in their embodied feelings results in a more direct, confrontational critique of their circumstances. However, postwar artists continue to explore the uses of traditional materials to provoke insight into the abstract relationships between their minds and their subjects.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed how traditional artists use aesthetic symbols and how the viewer responds to and understands artworks from culture to culture—be it ancient art or the contemporary art of a specific country such as Vietnam. This chapter has also represented the Vietnamese visual arts in the past and present contexts, focusing on the expression of anxiety and traumas after war. Tillich and Ducasse's theories have been discussed in order to understand how the feeling of anxiety or anxiousness is represented in the conventional art of Vietnam. For example, the *Thousand eyes and thousand hands Buddha* statue produced in the

late seventeenth century was a traditional metaphorical symbol of Vietnam. This statue expresses the Vietnamese citizens' concerns about the 100 years of civil war at that time.

Vietnamese contemporary art pushed the visual arts into a new historical phase after 1985, triggered by the conclusion of the 20-year Vietnam war and the advent of the Doi Moi Policy. The discussion in this chapter has focused on thematic anxiety and the various modes of expressing traumas ranging from war, human life and the human condition to social and political issues. The postwar artists who successfully broke away from a conservative expression of art changed to a new Vietnamese traditional culture. They explored and developed their art, using cultural materials. They attempted many new ways of expressing their emotions to reveal their anxieties. Postwar artists have clearly created a new phase for the Vietnamese visual arts. Their artworks reveal that the narrative of modern and contemporary art still remains in a Buddhist-Confucianist context, its elements reflected in their artworks.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **Cultural and Psychological Traumas Reflected in Artworks**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will illustrate the ways in which trauma can be spread and how it has affected personal and social contexts in Vietnam. The first section will focus on an examination of how cultural trauma exists and how it threatens the North Vietnamese people and how cultural trauma has transformed the political climate in the North. This symptom of cultural traumatising is shown in the visual arts in narrative form through the northern artists' representations. Dang Xuan Hoa, an artist resident in Hanoi, is a case study for this section. In examining how Vietnamese cultural trauma affected Dang Xuan Hoa's collective memory, as reflected in his artworks, the case study will map his art activities with reference to three broad themes—namely, *Children homeless*, *A Circle of life* and *Human's objects*.

An analysis of how war traumas have affected people in South Vietnam, and how they adapted to the communist system of belief established in their society in 1975, will also be undertaken. A case study examining the work of the visual artist Hoang Tuong will feature in this analysis. Hoang Tuong is a victim of the Vietnam War, and he has been living under communist control since 1975. In the south of Vietnam, the communist culture resulted in many changes and brought to Hoang Tuong a feeling of depression for a long time. He has what he calls a 'double mental wound': a breach in the child's mind experience that occurred as a result of seeing death and violence everywhere he lived and then experiencing a new dominant belief, opposite to that before 1975. It took him a long time to adapt to the new culture. Using the visual arts, he narrates what happened to him through two genres of artwork abstract and figurative expressions. His abstract expressionist artworks (1986–2000) focus on metropolitan contexts, showing Ho Chi Minh City's atmosphere of terror, created by the new communist environment after 1975 from the artist's point of view. The second series, which uses figurative expression, is a body of work created, in response to 20 years of living under Vietnamese communist beliefs.

These artworks were created after 2000, when he was more settled in this environment. This series of artworks is evidence that, despite Hoang Tuong's efforts to forget past warfare, traumatic memories nonetheless remain, his works subconsciously referencing his past trauma. Using paint, and with no preliminary sketches, he narrates by using a direct creative process on canvas. He tries to identify the issues that have endlessly continued to annoy him ( Hoang Tuong, 2013, pers. comm., 16 January). Hoang Tuong's work represents how the past experiences of warfare haunt him, and his negativities views of society appearing in his thoughts are evident in this series of figurative paintings. He belongs to those artists I group together whose work deals with war trauma and who are discussed in the Literature Review. This group includes such artists as Henry Moore with his artwork *Crowd looking at a tied-up object*, 1942, and Robert Hirsch with his artwork *World in a jar: war and trauma*, 2009.

This chapter will also discuss the different environments that contribute to the determination of ideas and the ways of expression in the two artist's works. The case studies involve two artists whose artworks represent the many ways in which trauma can be expressed creatively in Vietnam. Both artists use their collective social memories and their personal experiences, which are in turn reflected in their works. The artists also represent the differences between the cultural and psychological trauma of the northern group of artists and those of the southern group. Their works will be used to demonstrate their intimate relationship with the political environments and cultural changes in the two regions. Their artworks portray how the North and the South Vietnamese people represent the impact of postwar trauma after 1985.

Postwar traumas were acknowledged in Vietnam in 1985, and around this time many international scholars began to identify and discuss the global traumas of the twentieth century. Sztompka and others describe in their research the strong impact of trauma in conditions that bear an affinity to Vietnamese cultural traumas since 1985. Sztompka (2004) and another three scholars, Smelser (2004), identify changes in the twentieth century that create a type of trauma:

The twentieth century is sometimes described as the 'age of change'. The speed, scope, depth and wonder of change—driven by scientific and technological innovation, challenges of competition, emancipatory, aspirations of the masses, progressivist ideologies, universal education, and

so on—are perhaps unparalleled in any period of earlier history. Therefore particularly large pools of changes become potentially traumatogenic, that is, sudden, comprehensive, fundamental, and unexpected. Their impact on their cultural fabric of societies is strong and varied (Smelser, 2004, p. 162; original emphasis).

Vietnamese cultural traumas were recognised by the government and scholars in 1985, after the failure of the embargo policies in 1975 when the war ended, as discussed in the Literature Review. These policies led the nation to serious trauma according to several scholars, Marr, White, Nguyen Huyen Chau, Vo Nhan Trí, Suzy Pain, Melanie Beresford, Max Spoor and Jayen Werner, (1988) who researched Vietnamese postwar traumas, as mentioned in the Literature Review. The destruction caused by the traumatic events caused enormous difficulties for individuals and the community in relation to their cultural development after the Vietnam War.

Sztompka (2004, pp. 168–9) identifies that ‘trauma is neither a cause nor a result, but a process, a dynamic sequence of six typical stages’. He names this a ‘traumatic process’, or a ‘traumatic sequence’. Sztompka describes the six stages of a traumatic sequence. The first stage concerns traumatogenic change (rapid, widespread and unexpected) in the environment. The second stage is the trauma of a disorganised culture. The third stage is a result of traumatogenic change, and at this stage the trauma pertains to situations, or events, rather than of culture. This traumatogenic change affects people in this environment. The fourth stage is about traumatic conditions, which are expressed by a set of traumatic symptoms and beliefs. The fifth stage shows posttraumatic adaptation, which employs various strategies for coping with trauma. The sixth stage is about overcoming trauma by consolidating a new cultural complex. This is the closing phase of the sequence.

Sztompka (2004) also divides the traumatic sequence into three types. The first type is a kind of process that consists of everything of importance that happens in the wider world outside a given society that has affected that society, such as market fluctuations, the policies of superpowers and so on. The second type includes changes in the law, politics, economics and everyday life of the society, such as the turnover of political elites and major reforms. Some of these processes may intensify trauma, while others may contribute to its effects. The third type is the universal and inevitable process of generational turnover and the clash between



legacies and traditions and the new culture derived from traditional culture. The new generation emerges and rises under different conditions in the changed and reformed society. Consistent with Sztompka's three types of traumatic sequence (above), Vietnamese cultural trauma is identified as the second type of trauma process. This can be reviewed through the phenomenon of the Doi Moi period. After 1986, Vietnam began to introduce changes in all domains, including in its traditions and in the arts (as discussed in the Literature Review).

## **North Vietnam and its Social and Cultural Issues**

To understand how culturally traumatic factors have affected individuals in the period since 1975, we need to review national issues prior to 1975. During the Vietnam War, between 1954 and 1975, Vietnam was unable to produce enough food to feed the Vietnamese people. The country always needed international assistance for food. As discussed in the Literature Review, post-1975 Vietnam no longer received international support and assistance. Although the north of Vietnam became politically powerful and the nation was united, the country had experienced a devastating period. Many beggars from different provinces and from the middle of Vietnam flooded into Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The majority of Vietnamese families living in North Vietnam were starving; they had no money, no food and limited educational opportunities (Marr, 1988, pp. 15–20). They had suffered not only from the effects of the national embargo policies but also from the national grieving over the loss of family members who had died during the battles with the South Vietnamese Army and the depopulation of the land after war. In addition to physical hardships, cultural traditions were collapsing as members of the younger generation became exposed to Western Culture through globalised communication structures. Eyerman (2004a) confirms that when cultural traumas develop in a nation, people recollect factors from social experience, and these factors build a reconstruction of collective memories; the media has an important role in that process.

### **Case study 1: Dang Xuan Hoa**

The Vietnamese cultural trauma evident in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is a complex one; with a culture rich in traditional Vietnamese customs seemingly changing into a shapeless cultural chaos. These issues are addressed and presented in the work of Dang Xuan Hoa. The artist was born in 1959 in a rural

area in Nam Dinh in the north of Vietnam (see Figure 22), where he was nurtured in a working-class family with pure Vietnamese traditional customs. The war had no impact on his childhood in Nam Dinh. In 1973, when he was 14 years old, he and his family moved to Hanoi. He passed the examination for a five-year visual arts scholarship at the Vietnam University of Fine Arts, where he studied from 1978 to 1983. When he completed his Bachelor of Fine Arts he began to work full-time as an artist. He married and had his first child after graduation. During the first 10 years after the war, Dang Xuan Hoa's family shared the nation's sense of destruction and suffering. Vietnamese cultural trauma (discussed in the Literature Review) was generated through major social changes in all domains and was triggered in particular by traumatising conditions and situations interpreted as threatening to the community. Dang Xuan Hoa and his family also suffered from the serious food shortages during that period, which has had a lasting impact on him. He and his wife mentioned this in the interview in 2012, describing how, at the time, his first child had had very little food and he had considered joining the expatriate labour force in order to feed his starving family. Like most of the Vietnamese population, Dang Xuan Hoa experienced anxiety and uncertainty for the 10 years preceding the Doi Moi period.

As a member of Hanoi's Gang of Five, Dang Xuan Hoa exhibited between 1990 and 2010 about 100 artworks narrating the North Vietnamese cultural traumas and global traumas that affected his environment. He did this with three major themes—*homeless children*, *a circle of life*, and *human's objects*—and shows how the Vietnamese people adapted resiliently to the postwar traumas ( Dang Xuan Hoa, 2012, pers. comm., 27 December). The theme *homeless children* includes 40 works of art in which Dang Xuan Hoa depicts the North Vietnamese people starving and lacking educational opportunities. In the series of artworks, *A circle of life*, a total of nine paintings on large canvases (130 cm x 300 cm each), Dang Xuan Hoa narrates how the North Vietnamese people coped with their devastating situation. These traumas were both physical (the destruction of cities and farmland) and cultural (the erosion of traditional ways of life and of understanding the world). He shows how people built their hopes out of grief. In *Human's objects*, Dang Xuan Hoa demonstrates how he escapes from dealing with the complexity of metropolitan and social issues; he uses the memories from his childhood and childhood observations of the past to retreat from the existing issues causing him trauma.



**Figure 22: Map indicating the place of birth and current place of residence of the two artists.**

Source: Vu, 2001, p. 10



**Figure 23a: Map indicating Dang Xuan Hoa's place of birth and where he relocated to avoid the warfare**

Source: Vu, 2001, p. 129



**Figure 23b: Map indicating Hoang Tuong's place of birth and where he relocated to avoid the warfare**

Source: Vu, 2001, p. 287

### *Dang Xuan Hoa's Homeless children series of artworks*

The issue of homeless children is common in the world; however, the reasons for homelessness can differ according to the social, economic or familial circumstances. Some areas reflect these issues to varying degrees, while in other areas, homelessness among children may be mostly associated with the consequences of urban development. A series of nearly 40 paintings by Dang Xuan Hoa concerning homeless children living on the streets provides an insight into their status. These paintings address issues of affect, cognition and memory in postwar trauma. His theme of homeless children shows evidence of his coping with and working through the traumas that have remained in Vietnam since 1985. These images represent his memories of the many nights on Hanoi streets that he shared with others, especially children who wondered if they would ever have a comfortable life. Hanoi's homeless children reminded him of his childhood life in the Nam Dinh countryside, (see figure 23a). The images of these children gave him a cognitive map, which shaped the way in which he presented this context on paper or on canvas. Dang Xuan Hoa represents this theme through his collected memories of

the sense of panic he experience daily from 1980 to 1985. The universal value of this theme was demonstrated when the Singapore Art Museum acquired his work *Children on the streets* in 2008 (see Figure 24).

Dang Xuan Hoa had shared the same experience of hunger as these homeless children at that time. He observed their facial expressions, their gestures and their clothing. These images and the children's moods had an impact on his memories. According to his wife, Dang Xuan Hoa vividly recalled these images from the time when he saw these children, compared them to his own personal experiences, and then transformed these ideas to create the themes for the two series *A circle of life* and *Homeless children* (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December).

On the left of *Children on the streets*, a painting produced in 2006, an adult tries to hold babies while sitting on a broken red-brick wall. The room is damaged and has no roof. Outside, messy corners suggest walls broken into pieces, and many children's faces appear on and between these broken walls. On the right of the painting a group of children with blue faces look towards the viewer. Falling building blocks surround them. Dang Xuan Hoa uses sombre, dark, swirling lines between the faces and figures to depict the emotions of the homeless children. These swirling lines contrast with the heavy horizontal slabs of grey, yellow and beige, which suggest bricks or roof rafters. These slabs float at the top of the painting and suggest a thunderstorm or the B-52 bomb attacks on Hanoi when Dang Xuan Hoa and I were there in 1972. The viewer can see in this work a sense of people sharing a hard time. The people in the warm, red house and the homeless children are living in the same situation. This artwork was created from the artist's strong feelings upon meeting the homeless people. His collective memories of the past, of the bombings, the hunger and the devastation are all depicted in this work. Dang Xuan Hoa uses symbolic expression rather than descriptive scenes of real places to approach his artworks.



**Figure 24: Dang Xuan Hoa, 2006, painting, *Children on the streets*, oil on canvas**

Source: Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December

Dang Xuan Hoa's artworks show a concern with national identity after 1975, and how he represents his concerns based on his memory. Vietnamese cultural trauma is reflected in Hoa's artwork together with a narrative story based on his memories of the changes in wider Vietnamese society after 1985. His memories of social tragedy were reinforced by watching films, watching and listening to the news and reading stories and he consequently created his *Homeless children* series between 1990 and 2000.

The aim of this analysis is to explore Dang Xuan Hoa's adaptation in the post war situations. In this artwork there is a personal narrative; the artist presents the story of how he coped with postwar traumatogenic change as did many other artists dealing with cultural trauma during the Doi Moi period. Dang Xuan Hoa's artwork is autobiographical. For example, his memory of the impact of the food shortages on him and his family, and his memory as a witness to the social and political reformation in the later period in Hanoi, are all reflected in his art. The artist reviews these events through his responses to the experiences of the past, to the future and to the fortunate opportunities that have led to unexpected changes to his life.

Dang Xuan Hoa was influenced by the impact of the processes of Vietnamese cultural trauma in the 10 years after 1975. However, he rapidly changed his attitude and his artistic style after being an artist-in-residence for a year in Boston,

Massachusetts, in 1994 for which he was nominated by the Vietnamese Fine Art Association Board. This opportunity greatly changed his life. The painting *A circle of life* (see Figure 20) is a narrative of how the community in Vietnam coped with their postwar traumas after 1975. Using his family members as subjects, Dang Xuan Hoa depicts the many changes in Hanoi society, from traditional culture to individual lifestyles. He also uses his family as the subject matter to expand the theme of change, to address the broader suffering of the Vietnamese community. A work entitled *My family fetched*, painted in 2008 as part of the series *A circle of life*, is an example (see Figure 25). Ian Findlay (2008) reported that with this artwork, Dang Xuan Hoa was listed in Sotheby's top 30 South-East Asian artists for 2008. He describes Dang Xuan Hoa as 'the finest painter of his generation in Vietnam and his artworks continue to make art that is both stimulating and relating to his time. His art speaks also of the examination of himself as an individual caught in rapidly changing times and the desire to record his world' (p. 104).

Close analysis of *My family fetched* reveals the artist's situation when he created this work of art, when he was experiencing the reformation of Vietnamese social and cultural life. In the centre of the artwork is a portrait of a woman with a black bird on the top of her head. To the left of her head are many ordinary pots and cups, a lamp and a rice bowl on a green background. To the right of her head is a traditional folk motif representing wrestlers, who are shown lying on a mattress on the green ground. At the top in the centre are two figures, a seated boy figure facing left and an inverted male figure to the right of the boy. In interview, Dang Xuan Hoa explained that the upside-down male figure is a self-portrait and represents his traumatogenic change or sudden change in circumstances.





**Figure 25: Dang Xuan Hoa, 2008, painting, *My Family Fetched*, oil on canvas**

Source: Findlay, 2008, p. 104

Seeing the world of art in New York afforded Dang Xuan Hoa the opportunity to see the variety of art produced by other artists. He represents this experience as a lucky-God figure at the top right in *My family fetched*. The young boy image is a self-portrait of Dang Xuan Hoa as a child. In interview, Dang Xuan Hoa said, 'I was naive and living in a pure Vietnamese tradition in the country, where I had freedom in my childhood without anxious interfering. I am appreciative of what I receive[d] from life' (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December).

In the artwork, Dang Xuan Hoa uses a flattened space with simple objects and an upturned viewpoint, suggesting his collective memories, in order to narrate a period of Vietnamese history and to express his social values. Observing this artwork, I (who also share the artist's background) have mixed feelings of happiness and anxiety when looking at the contrasting images in the artwork, specifically the representation of the old wrestling motif and the black bird image. These mixed feelings about symbolic images were discussed in the 2012 interview. In answer to the question, 'Does *My family fetched* portray a controversial dispute, which is indicated by the wrestling symbol and the black bird?', Dang Xuan Hoa responded by emphasising that the black bird on the female figure is a symbolic image expressing his confusion and anxieties when he was dealing with family matters in relation to broader community issues (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December).



These objects and their organisation suggest to the viewer that the basic need for an ordinary house has been rewarded. Dang Xuan Hoa and his family always just wished for enough food and basic living conditions to attain a fulfilling family life. *My family fetched* narrates the artist's life and shows the opportunities he has had to achieve his wishes. However, with *My family fetched* he also represents the first phase in the Vietnamese sequence of traumas following the rapid changes in the north of Vietnam. He uses the wrestling folk motif to narrate the interrelationship of complex social issues and family matters. He records the active change in society that affected his family and brought confusion and anxiety to everyone. These issues are represented through the contrast between the female figure with the black bird on her head and the other symbols. The atmosphere the work evokes memories of his life journey when he had to cope with postwar issues and their traumatic sequence in his environment after 1975 (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December). Dang Xuan Hoa represents the traumatogenic changes in his life.

Since 1990, more than 100 artworks have been produced as part of the *Human's objects* series. These artworks reflect Dang Xuan Hoa's feelings during different periods of his life and were often produced between his work on the other thematic series—namely, *A circle of life* and *Homeless children*. These artworks collectively reflect the six stages of the Vietnamese traumatic sequence.

Sztompka (2004, pp. 167–8) explains that the traumatic sequence is not a trauma but a process describing the trauma that occurs as a result of the emergence of a social movement, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. The following is an analysis of Dang Xuan Hoa's works and explains how he and his generation in the north of Vietnam coped with anxieties using the steps outlined in Sztompka's theory.

**Stage 1:** Traumatogenic change (rapid, widespread and unexpected) in an environment

Dang Xuan Hoa consistently uses his vivid childhood memories in his two series *A circle of life* and *Human's objects*. This emotional resource has been used effectively, as a means for the artist to look back and enjoy his childhood feelings or sometimes as an expression for the meaning of modern life. This resource and his feelings also enable him to depict his subtle emotions without directly expressing any anxiety or trauma existing in his environment at the time. Nguyen Quan, a

Vietnamese art critic, has commented that in his artworks, Dang Xuan Hoa not only shows his childhood memories but also represents all sorts of countryside artefacts as a means for cultural expression (Nguyen, 1997, p. 115). For example, rice fields, boats, kettles, rice bowls, native flowers and typical tables and chairs have all been composed in different ways in different artworks to represent the new traditions of country life (Nguyen, 1997). In my interview with Dang Xuan Hoa in 2012, he emphasised that after his period as an artist-in-residence in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1994, his art life changed. He still remembered the strength of his reactions to this trip, saying, 'I was shocked when I was confronted by many great artworks by international artists', adding, 'I recognised that if I want to be successful in this field of creation, I have to keep and develop the Vietnamese traditional art style' (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December).

### **Stage 2:** Trauma in a disorganised culture

Dang Xuan Hoa and his generation were involved in the cultural reformation in Vietnam that occurred between 1995 and 2005. The dynamic changes in culture and social movements, ushered in through the advent of global beliefs, had the potential to result in the end of conservative art. However, these factors inspired the younger generation of artists, including Dang Xuan Hoa. *My family fetched* reveals the artist's situation at the time of the dynamic changes in Vietnamese culture, together with the social changes resulting from the Doi Moi policies. In *My family fetched*, the symbol of a couple wrestling on the floor depicts a different emotion from that depicted by the other human figures, which show complex moods. Although the human figures represent different emotions, they all reveal a disorganisational change in their own situation through the artist's point of view (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December).

### **Stage 3:** A result of traumatogenic change, the trauma being the result of situations or events rather than of culture

Dang Xuan Hoa was in the same situation as other North Vietnamese artists who were involved in the social reform movement after 1986, who wanted to dispose of the conservative art. According to Nguyen Quan (Nguyen, 1997, p. 115), Dang Xuan Hoa quickly moved on from his academic art to an 'unrestricted' style (Nguyen, 2010, pp. 127–31) and encouraged the other four artists to become the Gang of Five, the group showing in many exhibitions in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City between 1990 and 1995. The Gang of Five was acknowledged by international and

national art critics, who commented on the group's events and supported their development during the Doi Moi period (Nguyen, 2010).

#### **Stage 4: Traumatic symptom and beliefs**

Sztompka (2004, p. 169) emphasises that in the face of trauma people revealing their new beliefs. To illustrate this stage, Dang Xuan Hoa shows his new beliefs by presenting traditional artefacts on canvas but with a new perception. Using strong and determined brush strokes, he creates compositions that invite the Vietnamese people to witness a new perspective on Vietnamese traditional art. He tirelessly shares his inventive art with his community. Even now, after the Gang of Five have split into diverse new groups, Dang Xuan Hoa continues to invent different ways of painting in his *Human's objects* series. Visual arts critic David Thomas (1997) states that Dang Xuan Hoa is one of the most important artists of the late twentieth century, not only because of his talent but also because of his leading role in the visual arts of expression and his openness to change (p. 150). Indeed, upon observing *Human's objects*, the viewer can discern a totally new way of expression based on Vietnamese traditional life. These old artefacts, spanning many thousands of years, appear in new ways through Dang Xuan Hoa's creativity, allowing the Vietnamese people to recognise and interpret his new ways without hesitation.

**Stages 5 and 6:** Posttraumatic adaptation, which employs various strategies for coping with trauma, and overcoming trauma by consolidating a new cultural complex

The *Human's objects* series shows how Dang Xuan Hoa has adapted to the rapidly changing Hanoi environment. His artworks show that he identifies himself as a rural person who wants to capture the spirit of life, nature and enjoyment. He also wants to record every aspect of his current life. Jeffrey Hantover (1997), an American art critic, asserts that every piece of Dang Xuan Hoa's artwork shows his extraordinary talent. He describes Dang Xuan Hoa as 'an artist [who] ... capture[s] the spirit of the whole [traditional art] that gave the art its original aesthetic power' (p. 149).

Two paintings entitled *Human's objects* (see Figures 26 & 27) have been selected from 100 of Dang Xuan Hoa's artworks in this series to represent his posttraumatic adaptation and the various strategies he has used to cope with trauma in the postwar period in Vietnam. In both artworks, the typical domestic interior and the Vietnamese countryside are represented honestly in accordance with his memory.

When the oil on canvas (1994) and the gouache work (1997) were produced, Dang Xuan Hoa was living in Hanoi, where the city's lifestyle and customs reflected the urbanisation of and rapid changes in Vietnamese culture. These artworks show how he borrows equally from traditional sources and global art in Vietnam to overcome the trauma by constructing a new cultural complex.

In terms of structural organisation, these two works combine Vietnamese folk tales, the values of traditional literature and the typical East Asian Vietnamese flat picture plane using a central emphasis in the composition. Furthermore, the works use a combination of interlinking forms sourced from traditional literature and symbols from Vietnamese folk art, which together depict his childhood memories of the objects he often saw in the houses of the country people. He then painted these motifs using multiple perspectives, with the finished artwork often looking like folk art. Thus, Dang Xuan Hoa prevails over trauma and attempts to restructure his 'personal system' using his memory and emotions.

In the two paintings, the table (see Figure 26) and the chair (see Figure 27) have been placed in the centre, revealing the home decor of country people. The objects depicted, such as teapots, rice bowls, chopsticks, vases and hand-fans, are ubiquitous in a traditional farmhouse. The *Human's objects* paintings show a relaxation in Dang Xuan Hoa's feelings, which relate to the different stages of coping with his anxieties. His escape into his childhood memories, as represented in these artworks, appears to resolve present life dilemmas and emphasises his attempt to overcome trauma. In interview, he spoke of how developing these works helped him to develop spiritually (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December).

Childhood memories, present-day family matters and the changing social environment all continue to influence Dang Xuan Hoa. This appears to support research by Calhoun and Tedeschi (1998), who found that 'reflections on how the trauma was handled and what was learned can become important evidence to individuals for what kind of persons they are, and had been before the trauma' (p. 232). In response, Sztompka (2004) found in a study of cultural trauma that 'people respond in different ways as they attempt to cope with trauma' (p. 167).



Figure 26: Dang Xuan Hoa, 1994, painting, *Human's objects*, oil on canvas

Source: Tran, 1997, p. 55



Figure 27: Dang Xuan Hoa, 1997, *Human's objects*, gouache

Source: Tran, 1997, p. 63

## South Vietnam before and after 1975

According to Ham (2007), the Vietnam War has caused many issues for people (pp. 163–486). He also provides evidence of how the South Vietnamese people lived in fear and suffered from war traumas, which continue to affect them and haunt their lives today. These issues of war trauma have affected the southern people who were directly involved in the war. This was evident in my interview with Hoang Tuong in 2012. He was a victim of the war when he was a child. Machel (2001, pp. 1–7) points out that the impact of war on children influences their perceptions in their later adolescent period, as Hoang Tuong admitted in my interviews with him in 2012 and 2013 (Hoang Tuong, 2012, pers. comm., 16 January; 2013, pers. comm., 1 September). This is a universal symptom, which has been examined by Calhoun and Tedeschi (1995), who describe this problem as follows:

People facing major life crises typically experience distressing emotions. Particularly for sets of circumstances that threaten the person's physical well-being, anxiety or specific fears are common. (pp. 21–22).

South Vietnam was a place of combat every day during the 20 years of war (1955–75) between North and South soldiers, which also involved international armies supporting each side (as mentioned in the Literature Review). In *Vietnam: the Australian war*, Ham (2007) relates that the war involved many soldiers from around the world, and he recollects a letter that had been written by Campbell, a warrant officer in the Australian army, to his wife, stating that 'to bury alive whole families including the children on no stronger pretext than they refused to take up arms defies the imagination' (p. 343). Ham also provides evidence, supplied in a letter from journalist Peter Arnett, that a US major informed Arnett that 'it became necessary to destroy the town to save it'.

According to Ham (2007, p. 328), the town Arnett mentioned in the letter above is Da Nang, where the Tet Offensive battle took place in 1968, the most destructive of the many battles in the war. Ham also discusses how, in the same year, Robert McNamara, the then US defense secretary, described the Vietnam War battles to President Johnson:

The picture of the world's greatest superpower killing or seriously injuring 1,000 non-combatants a week, while trying to pound a tiny backward nation

into submission on an issue whose merits are hotly disputed, is not a pretty one. (Ham, 2007, p. 328)

In 1985, 10 years after the war finished, the South Vietnamese people were still very unsettled because of the political and communist system, according to artists Trinh Cung and Hoang Tuong (Le 2012 & 2013, pers. comm., 21, December, 2012 & 11 September 2013). The North Vietnamese brought their communist culture to the south. This resulted in thousands of people fleeing to other countries at this time (Hoang, 2010). The people of the south had confronted the loss of family members in battles with the North Vietnamese Army, and now they had to also accept the new beliefs of the communist system. The sense of social destruction, loss of life and confused attitudes among the communities were heavily apparent in this environment. Wartime statistics demonstrate that in the south of Vietnam thousands of civilians were killed or wounded and thousands more became refugees because of the thousands of houses destroyed during this period (Marr & White, 1988).

### **Case study 2: artist Hoang Tuong**

This section presents a case study of the artist Hoang Tuong, a member of the South Vietnamese group of peoples who suffered postwar conditions. His paintings show the impact on his personality of the fear, loss and trauma caused by the war. As a child he witnessed the battles between the troops of the north and south. Later, he had to cope with the new communist beliefs, a total change from the expectations of his previous society.

Hoang Tuong is one of 10 abstract artists, known as the Abstract Group, who have been resident in Ho Chi Minh City since the Doi Moi Policy of 1986. Hoang Tuong was born in 1960 in Que Son, a village in Quang Nam-Da Nang province, which has Hoi An as its administrative centre see Figure 23b).

In 1964, he moved to Hoi An with his parents because the Viet Cong (communists) had taken Que Son. At that time, Hoang Tuong was four years of age. In my interview with him, he spoke of seeing many battles as he travelled to Hoi An by bicycle with his grandmother. He subsequently lived in Hoi An from 1964 to 1968. He attended a boy's primary school in Hoi An from 1965. On the way to school, he sometimes saw corpses lying near his school with distorted faces and dark blood. One day he went to school, only to find that it had become a pile of bricks; the Viet

Cong had used cannons to destroy it. Because of the many battles in Hoi An, his parents decided to move again, this time to Da Nang, in the province of Quang Nam-Da Nang. In Da Nang, there was a mix of American and Vietnamese troops. Hoang Tuong witnessed the international troops capture a Vietnamese communist and hit him with batons and beat and verbally abuse him. He also witnessed American soldiers treating children badly and making rude comments about them. The troops played loud music non-stop all day and night, which was seen as culturally transgressive by the whole community. His family again decided to move, this time to Saigon in 1971 (now named Ho Chi Minh City). These images have permanently in Hoang Tuong's memory (Le 2013, pers. comm., 17 September).

Hoang Tuong finished his art college studies in 1975 when Vietnam became unified. He accepted a job illustrating a children's newspaper entitled *Purple Ink*. He became a full-time painter after 2005. Hoang Tuong has been regularly represented in many exhibitions and has exhibited in Melbourne, Sydney, Singapore and the United States. He uses art to represent the process of his struggle to cope with the huge changes in society after the war.

Hoang Tuong and the 10 artists in the south started to use the abstract expressionist style to speak out about their concerns and their depression. They regularly exhibited their artworks to the public after the implementation of the Doi Moi policies. In my interview with Hoang Tuong, he said that his period of abstract expressionist was mainly concerned with metropolitan issues, which had caused him stress and fear, and he spoke of the hopelessness he had felt in his disenchantment with the new environment. In an early work from his abstract period entitled *Moving light*, 1998 (see Figure 28), he used an abstract art style, with black and grey pigments depicting two blocks of moving light; between them a coiled wire line can be seen surrounding the soldiers' camps in South Vietnam. A rigid tunnel divides the two blocks of light, giving the viewer a feeling of hopelessness about trying to reach a fading moon in the centre of the picture. This artwork does not give the viewer any positive feelings; rather, it is an expression of melancholia. According to LaCapra (1999), *melancholia* is a characteristic of a blocked process in which the depressed and traumatised self, locked in compulsive repetition, is possessed by the past, faces a future of impasses and remains narcissistically identified in the lost object (p. 713).

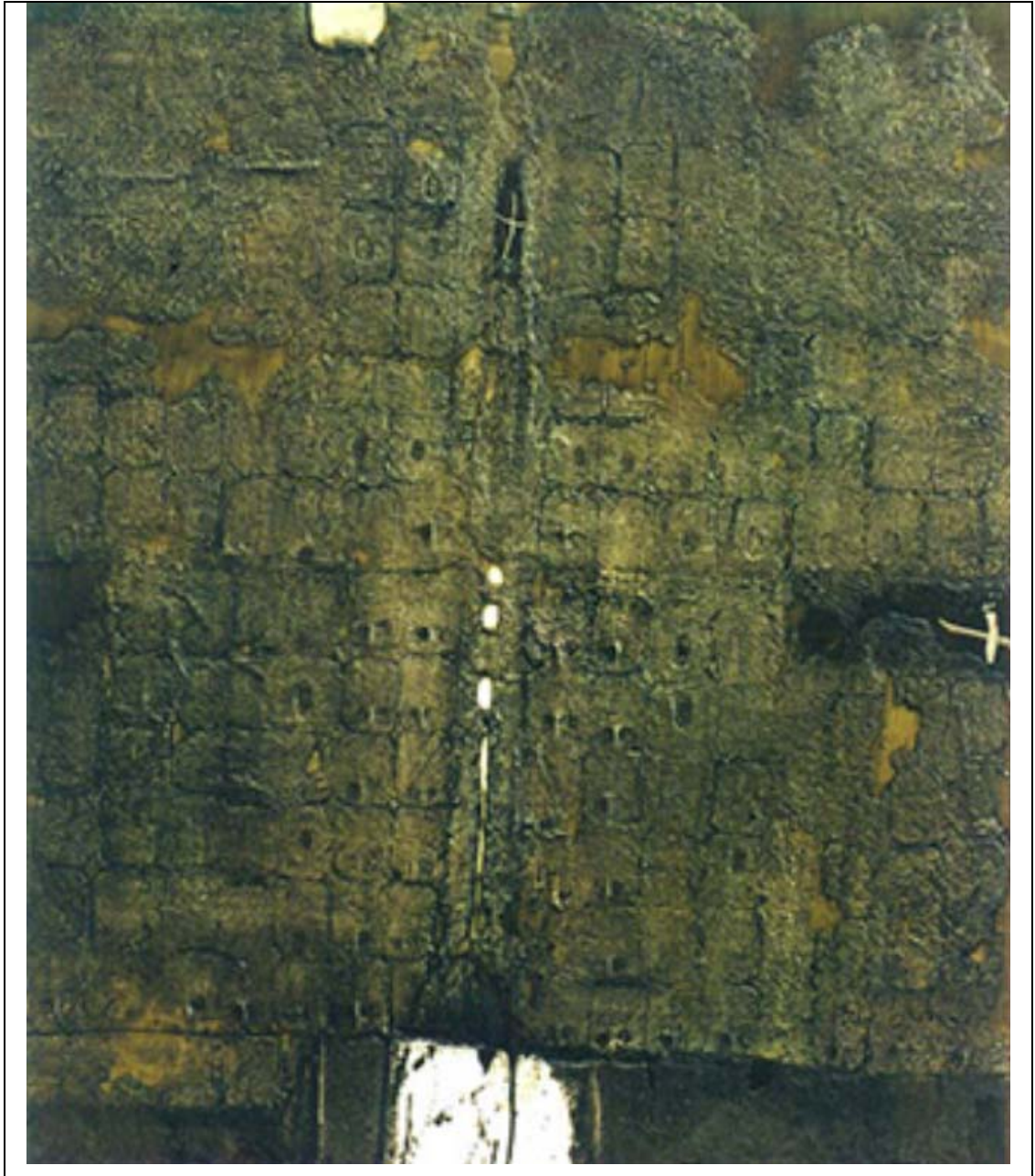


How does Hoang Tuong express his feelings in *Moving light* as a form of melancholia? In the interview, he described the process involved in developing his work of art in order to express his feelings. He begins with a certain idea, but after the first few brush strokes appear on the canvas he paints subconsciously, following his personal emotions, after which his aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgement facilitate the process of completing the work. Formally, his abstract works have an intense quality of unity; however, their emotional content stops them from being shallow, revealing his vulnerability to fear. *Moving light* is a critical narrative as well as an expression of melancholic thoughts. In this work, the two blocks of light show a subversion of the concept of light as illumination; instead, they visually express the emotions of feeling melancholy and depressed. This deconstruction is a way of working through his process of traumatic identity and portrays a complex sense of lifelessness and loss. It represents in visual form his personal depression.



**Figure 28: Hoang Tuong, 1998, painting, *Moving light*, mixed media**

Source: Le 2013, pers. comm., 16 January



**Figure 29: Hoang Tuong, 2000, painting, *Orient*, mixed media**

Source: Le 2013, pers. comm., 16 January 2013

Hoang Tuong's *Orient* series depicts the metropolitan atmosphere in Ho Chi Minh City where he lives. The work entitled *Orient* (See Figure 29) has the same title as the series of artworks produced in 2000 and expresses great emotional distress after intense rumination in the 15 years following the announcement of the Doi Moi Policy. In my interview with Hoang Tuong in 2013, he said he produced this artwork at a time when he was exhausted from coping with the political and social issues in Ho Chi Minh City and was attempting to find a way to reduce his distress and discomfort. Through the use of various tones of mouldy green colours in square

blocks in his composition, he depicts how he felt about Ho Chi Minh City at that time. Using a high viewpoint, he composes a dense city landscape with rotten green blocks suggesting a dramatic environment and a breathless city. He explained that the white square shapes and dropped white strokes are places for escapism. The viewer may, however, see these white blocks as the graves of dead people. Hoang Tuong shows deep personal rumination, which in turn reflects the social issues of South Vietnam that arose from postwar traumas. In Hoang Tuong's memory and contemporary reminiscences, he frequently returns to his thoughts about the past, which is characteristic of depression. *Orient*, 2000, shows his sense of unfairness about or dissatisfaction with his metropolitan existence. This work also presents his negativity about adapting to Vietnamese cultural changes. Calhoun and Tedeschi (1998) refer to 'different traumas different aftermaths' (p. 236). Indeed, the types of traumas experienced by Hoang Tuong and the South Vietnamese people after the war were different from those experienced in the North. Indeed the former had to cope with a new belief system in their cultural life, Vietnamese feudalism, communism, as well as the aftermath of the chaotic bloodshed and battles with the northern people. Hoang Tuong stated that the city in his artworks often looks decayed, ragged and overcrowded, with very few places to escape and relax. He seen no benefits from the Doi Moi policies in his city, and they did not bring him or other South Vietnam artists many opportunities when compared with North Vietnam resident artists (Le 2013, pers. comm., 17 September).

Since 1986, South Vietnam resident artists reformed the visual arts through the modern abstract expressionist period of about 10 years (mentioned in the Literature Review). After that, the artists worked individually. Artists were neither promoted nor provided with opportunities to further develop their art through policies such as those that assisted resident artists in the North. The political, cultural and economic centre for the visual arts in Vietnam had become Hanoi.

#### *Hoang Tuong's figurative expression series of artworks*

In my interview with Hoang Tuong, he said he decided to change his style from abstract to figurative expression around the year 2000 (Le 2013, pers. comm., 17 September). He said that abstraction was not a good medium for him to express his concerns about the human issues where he lived. He said, 'This art for art's sake presented my opinions to only a small group of people who can understand art in various contexts, and only these small numbers of people are able to appreciate my

works of art'. He added that after 2000, this art style did not suit his new themes. He said, 'I wanted to broaden what my community and myself are concerned about. Therefore, I decided to change to a different art style since 2000 in order for me to get a better response from the public, or in other words, from the widespread audience in the world' (Le 2013, pers. comm., 17 September). The content of his abstract art pre-2000 focused on imaginative metaphors. For example, in the painting *Orient*, 2000, Hoang Tuong used a multitude of rotten green blocks to represent his decaying metropolitan environment and to portray the city's anxious atmosphere under the new communist cultural system. He used a metaphorical vehicle for this work, but he believed that this was not a strong enough way to communicate his concerns. Hoang Tuong also recognised that society had changed quickly in that decade and that he needed to adapt to those changes; therefore, he moved to figurative expression to more clearly address what he understood of his environment and identity (Le 2013, pers. comm., 17 September).

The rapid change in Vietnamese culture created a new crisis in South Vietnam. Hoang Tuong represents the trauma of its postwar growth and its specific ways of adaptation. South Vietnam's historical narrative can be seen in Hoang Tuong's figurative paintings, which represent a trauma that differs in quality and nature from that in North Vietnam. Research by Eyerman (2004a), who analysed how individuals presented cultural trauma, shows that individual stories meld into a collective history through forms and processes of collective representation. These representations are of direct personal experiences as well as broader social and cultural information, which are associated with memory and rooted in historical events that are mediated through narratives. Collective memories are modified with the passage of time and filtered through cultural artefacts that represent the past in the present.

Twenty-five years after the war ended, Hoang Tuong mentioned how the issues of war affected him and the people of the South using the latter style of art: figurative expression. The memories of his horrible experiences returned him to the past. This common symptom can be explained through van der Kolk's observations. Van der Kolk described how traumas occur and reoccur in the victim's memories:

Despite avoidance of emotional involvement, traumatic memories cannot be avoided; even when pushed out of waking consciousness, they come back in the form of reenactment, nightmare, or feeling related to the trauma. ...

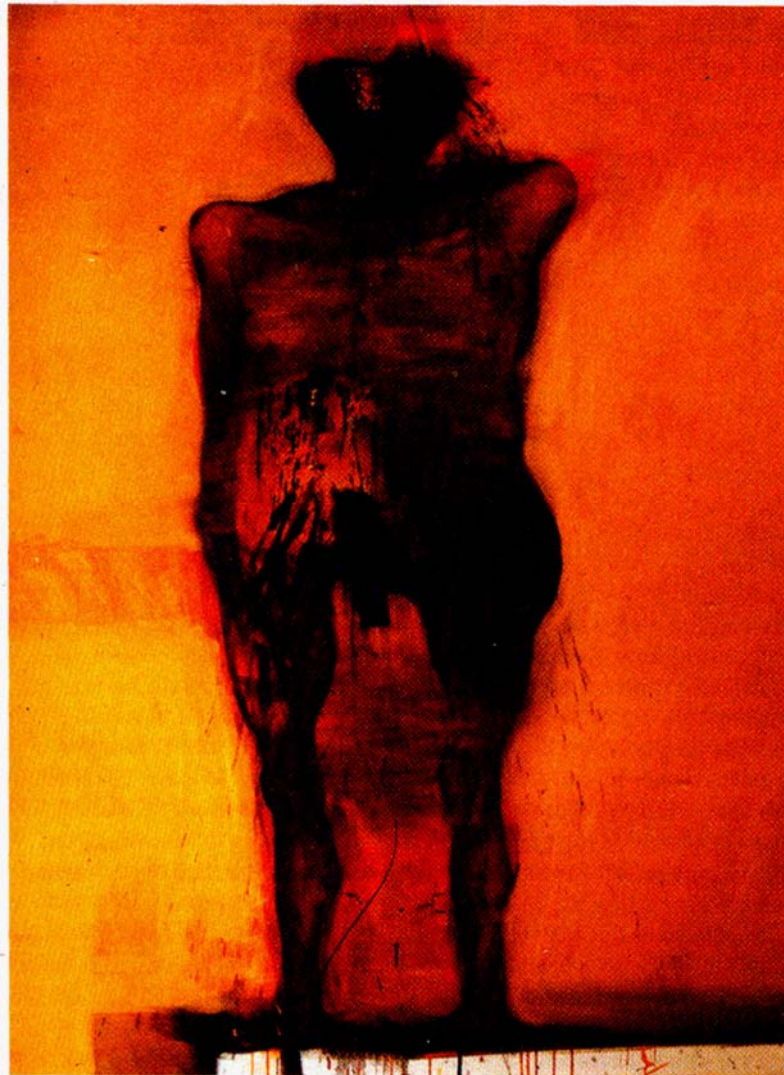
Recurrences may continue throughout life during periods of stress (Van der Kolk, as cited in Smelser, 2004, p. 41).

Viewing *Figure in the shower*, 2008 (see Figure 30), one can return to the question of the role of this artist in the contemporary society of Vietnam in 2008 and to the question of the relationship between his current stress and his past experiences. His memories of death and corpses activate him in the present. In this artwork, Hoang Tuong confronts the viewer by using the distorted shape of a human body in the centre of the painting. The figure has no face, only a black shape, and only one hand that is stuck on the body and surrounded by a shower of red, orange and yellow liquids. The figure is depicted as tortured by grief through mourning. Findlay (2008, p. 8) notes that this artwork was exhibited in Melbourne for a Ho Chi Minh art showcase, which featured art academic Dr Anne Runhardt's lecture on contemporary Vietnamese art, in which she commented on the South Vietnamese art of expression. Findlay also included a quote from Hoang Tuong, who commented on his artwork *Figure in the shower* as follows:

I try my best to beat him, to uncover things that are hidden inside his body, inside his mind or at the bottom of his heart. This hurts him, but give[s] me a feeling of safety and comfort (cited in Findlay, 2008, p. 8).

In this painting, the viewer can see not only Hoang Tuong's search for something hidden in his self portrait but also the revelation that his past experience of warfare appears to haunt him and is revealed through his subconscious creative process. The viewer may also question whether Hoang Tuong tries to identify and understand another side of himself as an ordinary person and consider how his childhood memories of frequent moves from place to place to avoid the violence of war have affected him. By using a demolished human figure dripping with red blood, suggesting mental and physical brutality, *Orient* shows how the artist's rebellious nature began—as a result of the fighting, which caused hurtful and painful emotions.





*Figure in the shower, 2008, acrylic and oil on canvas*

**Figure 30: Do Hoang Tuong, 2008, painting, *Figure in the shower***

Source: Le 2013, pers. comm., 16 January



**Figure 31: Do Hoang Tuong, 2013, painting, *In his own shelter***

Source: Le 2013, pers. comm., 16 January

Hoang Tuong has also had to cope with a totally new concept in his life—that of communist culture—over three decades of rapid cultural development. He has been living from aftermath to aftermath. He and his peer group have had to deal with many factors and show a constraining fealty to many powerful figures in the new society. As a result, his stress, fears and anxieties appear on his canvas when he attempts to make a self-portrait. Caruth (1995 p. 182) points out that a victim of trauma can understand this struggle through multiple combinations of recurring

images of the past when depressed. In this case, Hoang Tuong's depression was a direct consequence of the increasing social postwar issues after 2000 in the south of Vietnam, whereby his response to these issues combined with his own haunting experiences. Caruth also defines this symptom as post-traumatic stress disorder.

When expressing his feelings of depression on canvas using figuration, Hoang Tuong represents his struggle to adapt to the new culture. His chosen method of painting is to use 'subconscious' strategies. This creative process allows him to transform the stories of his life into symbolic images, including his feelings of depression. Directly channelling his past war experiences is also involved in this process. He said that he felt better when he saw an ugly figure appearing on the canvas, emerging from his complex emotions. In Hoang Tuong's figurative paintings, there are other dimensions that emerge from his expression of negativities. These aspects include his expectations of an emotional response from the viewer as they come to terms with their own responsibilities for and reactions to the events. The artwork *In his own shelter*, 2013, is again a disquieting portrait of the artist, depicted his personal space surrounded by a flat yellow wall. The figure exposes brutalised emotions and powerlessness, depicted by having no hands. During my interview with the artist, he said that a figure without hands represents powerlessness in terms of physical and mental expression. He added, 'Recently I have produced a series of figurative works without hands expressing the powerlessness of ordinary people in my environment'. *In his own shelter* is a work in which Hoang Tuong makes a critical analysis of his own life and his own difficulties in coping with the social and cultural contexts in the 2010s (Le 2013, pers. comm., 16 January).

Hoang Tuong's practice reveals that those who share a common fate do not necessarily share common experiences. This point is underscored by the different reactions to the shared national changes in the south and north of Vietnam. Hoang Tuong and Dang Xuan Hoa respond in different ways as they attempt to cope with similar traumas. While Dang Xuan Hoa attempts to overcome trauma and address it constructively in certain situations, Hoang is in rebellion. However, through their art, they both show how they have adapted and continue to adapt to the cultural changes in Vietnam. The collective memory of Hoang Tuong and his peer group is one of witnessing battles and other disruptive experiences of war. Hoang Tuong's work shows how his past and present identity function to frame his destiny and creativity. In contrast, Dang Xuan Hoa takes the various forms of Vietnamese



cultural traumas and targets the new changes in the community and the impact of globalisation on Vietnamese traditional culture. Through his art he shows how his community struggles with this development. Dang Xuan Hoa's artworks present his struggles with the cultural trauma through three expressive themes—namely, homeless children, a circle of life, and human's objects. Hoang Tuong's artworks present his efforts to adapt to the new communist culture that is transforming traditional cultures in the Vietnamese south. Using his themes, he depicts how individuals in the south have had to cope from crisis to crisis in relation to social issues resulting in representing the destruction of personal identity in the south.

## **Conclusion**

The two artists discussed in this chapter represent Vietnamese postwar traumas differently, showing the ways in which traumas have affected their lives. To understand the two different artistic voices and to understand the presentation of their narrative stories, we need to address each artist's voice and ascertain its source. Each voice is associated not only with the individual artist's story but also with the traumas of other people.

The two artists represent two different types of postwar trauma in Vietnam. Dang Xuan Hoa's artworks pertain to the North's historical phenomena while Hoang Tuong's pertain to the South. The cultural traumas as represented by both artists clearly show the use of a mixture of modern and traditional art practices to express Vietnamese contemporaneity during the period of globalisation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The Vietnamese postwar traumatic context, presented in silent ways by Vietnamese people, is not acknowledged internationally. Accounts by many researchers and scholars, such as Ham (2007), Marr and White (1988), Griffin (1988) and Vo (1990), mainly focus on the personal stories of foreign Vietnam veterans. The postwar trauma in Vietnam itself will become a bigger international issue as refugees spread their stories of trauma. People may believe that the postwar trauma in Vietnam has no relevance for their own countries and argue that there is no need to be concerned. Others might simply regard the problems of the war in Vietnam as 'old history' and talk about the war in disconnected ways only.

In this chapter, I have stressed some significant issues that continue in Vietnam, issues that should be further considered by more researchers in order to understand the truth of the Vietnam War and its complex historical issues in the context of a globalising social world., Nonetheless, the silent grief of the Vietnamese people is clearly evident in the visual arts.

In the following chapter, I will explore these issues of trauma in Vietnam as expressed through contemporary art and examine how they are being expressed by the new voices of a later generation. The ways in which these young artists are changing their approaches to self representation will be shown to be a significant development from the work of Dang Xuan Hoa and Hoang Tuong, who narrated the Vietnamese social and cultural contexts.

## **Chapter 5:**

# **Young Artists Represent Themselves and Show Their Experiences of the Vietnamese Cultural Trauma Through the Transformation of Tam-Giao Beliefs in the Visual Arts After the Doi Moi Period**

### **Introduction**

The post-Doi Moi period in Vietnam marked a turning point in Vietnamese culture, and it was at this time that the generation of artists born around the 1970s began their artistic careers. Their careers were shaped by the following factors. First, communism collapsed in Eastern Europe, and as a result the Communist Party in Vietnam modified its methods for controlling the nation. Second, the nation had to repair the damage and decay of the previous decade, and the Sixth National Congress of the Communist Party held in December 1986 was a turning point for Vietnam after the economic failures. Finally, the Doi Moi policy focused on domestic economic renovation and its integration into the world economy. This policy also provided citizens with opportunities to work overseas. Vietnamese people were pleased with the new freedoms, as individuals had the right to visit relatives overseas and to marry foreigners (Klintworth, 1991, pp. 237–41).

To express the atmosphere of fast-changing cultural values during this transformational period, artists generally focused on the key points of their personal lives. Artist Vu Dinh Tuan portrays this in two series of artworks discussed in this chapter. In this period of change, people were confused as well as anxious. This contemporary confusion is related to the structural differences between Vietnamese tradition and current cultural developments. The situation for people in Vietnam now is different from that in previous decades; therefore, their trauma and anxiety are reflected in different ways. LaCapra (1999b, pp. 723–4) classifies traumas according to two categories: the first is ‘historical trauma’, which is related to particular tangible events involving loss, and the second is ‘structural trauma’, which is an anxiety-producing condition, possibly related to the potential for historical trauma. The latter is a social, political and ethical category, not a psychological category. La Capra also explains that structural trauma is often shown in various ways such as

ambivalence, pain, excitement or an experience of the sublime. Everyone is subject to structural trauma, although individuals may react to it differently.

The post-Doi Moi artists are confronting new types of cultural traumas as entire traditional values have been changed through a process of change to their democratic culture (Klintworth, 1991, pp. 237–41). This chapter will illustrate the many ways in which artists use their artworks to represent the Vietnamese cultural changes that have occurred in all aspects of life in Vietnam. In this period, artworks show how structural trauma affects these artists who are concerned about their ethical practices.

Sztompka's (2004) traumatic sequence model will be used to discuss how the post-Doi Moi artists have addressed Vietnamese cultural and social issues in their artworks (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of the term *traumatic sequence*). Traumatic sequence is a process through which a fresh social movement emerges and, as part of this process, new values are added to traditional values. The Doi Moi period and Vietnam's societal transformation was a healing phase of changing economic beliefs and traditional values. The new cognitive thinking about Vietnamese identity reflects a mix of Confucianism and democratic values revealed in the reconstruction in the post-Doi Moi period. During this period, individuals have claimed more freedom, not only in the political realm but also in all aspects of their life (Marr & White, 1988, pp. 15-45).

### **Post-Doi Moi young artists represent cultural traumas**

Post-Doi Moi artists represent three symptomatic trends of trauma in their artworks. The first is the traumatising situation. I will use the work and life of Nguyen Minh Thanh and Dinh Thi Tham Poong to represent this context. The second trend is the coping strategies that have been used to address post-traumatic issues. Artist Vu Dinh Tuan will be discussed in this context with reference to two series of artworks. The third trend is the emergence of a Vietnamese cultural contradiction and the emerging symptoms of democratic and capitalist culture. The artwork of Ly Tran Quynh Giang will illustrate this trend in Vietnam.

Sztompka (2004, pp. 171–5) identified four categories of traumatising conditions and situations. The first includes new forms of risks and threats in an ambivalent culture and society. These symptoms become a burden for an unprepared people.

The second category includes the deterioration of living standards. In this category the status hierarchies are overturned and large regions are visibly in poverty. The third category includes important perceptions about old and inherited practices that have become outdated. This refers to the shift in social awareness due to new ideas, concepts and policies inspired by systemic change. The fourth category includes dilemmas and discontentment born from former regimes. Of these four categories, the third best describes the Vietnam in the post-Doi Moi period, when young people are embracing and showing their new freedoms economically, culturally and in their everyday lifestyles.

In Vietnam, the post-Doi Moi group produced diverse artworks that contradicted traditional art. Post-Doi Moi art emerged from the change in social and moral values reflected in the individual's outlook on political, cultural and social behaviour. Individual artists are important influencers in this period because Vietnamese people assume that contemporary culture reflects currently lived experiences and social practices at an individual level.

Artist Nguyen Minh Thanh, born in 1971, exhibited an installation artwork in Berlin, Germany, in 1999 entitled *Rice field*. The artwork shows the structural traumas directly related to the historical trauma in Vietnam. In this work he addresses three major issues through his traditional and political points of view. The first issue is the sacrifices made by women, especially by Vietnamese mothers during war times. The second issue is Vietnamese superstitious beliefs, which shifted from Tam Giao philosophy after the Vietnam War. The last issue concerns Vietnamese politics and its role in the development of culture and traditions in Vietnam.

The three-square-metre *Rice field* is an installation composed of many inverted incense sticks, which represent a field of rice (see Figure 32). It has a backdrop (150 cm x 300 cm) of seven panels in black and light-brown colours. On these panels are painted shapes relating to Vietnamese women's farm clothing. The black represents women's trousers, and the light-brown shapes depict traditional shirts. According to Nguyen Minh Thanh, this installation addresses the role of Confucian motherhood duties in times of war and the consequences of the Vietnam War (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December).

To understand the characteristics of Vietnamese women, one needs to understand their cultural heritage. The image of women or mothers in Vietnamese history is

linked to the control of the family in domestic matters. The role of mothers in supporting their families has, over many centuries, followed the teachings of Confucianism. Vietnamese women service the household, but these roles became more burdensome when the nation was at war. During war, most Vietnamese men went on military duty and were away from the fields (Dutton, 2013, pp. 2–12). Therefore, mothers had to take on the duties normally performed by men. Mothers were not only responsible for the family but also for agricultural work.

In interview, Nguyen Minh Thanh recalled that when he was a child he saw no healthy young men in the village where he lived. Women worked on farms or they ran small businesses with their children. In his memory, only a few men remained because they had disabilities and were unable to perform military service. He noted that his mother did all of the housework, farming and other tasks. She worked very hard to ensure her family of five children survived the poverty experienced during the Vietnam War and the embargo period between 1975 and 1985 (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December).

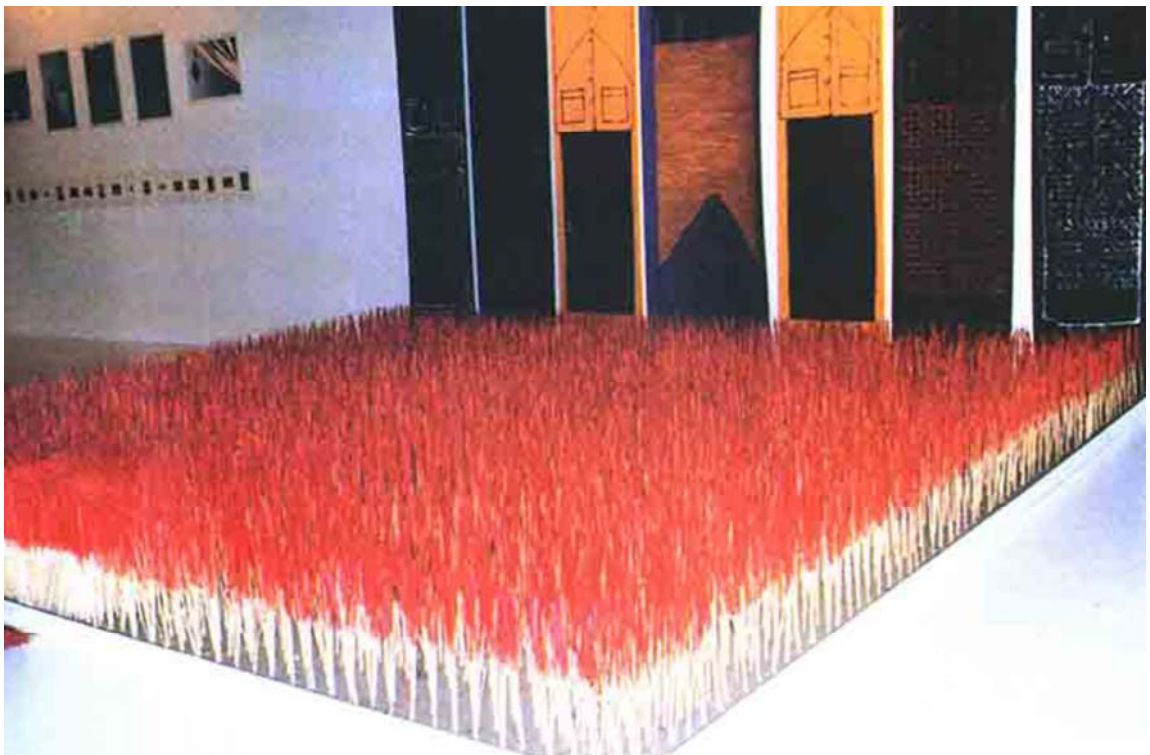
The teaching of Confucianist principles about women's morality required women to learn how to devote themselves to their families, especially to their children. This is one of the traits of women in the Vietnamese Confucianist tradition. According to Dutton (2013, pp. 8–10), Nguyen Trai, a scholar of the Le dynasty in the fifteenth century, wrote the most important *gia huấn* for women (a woman's duty in the family). In this *gia huấn*, the role of women is that of 'secretaries of the interior', especially while their husbands handle foreign affairs; in other words, the woman is the 'interior general'. These roles became automatic habitual behaviour. Vietnamese women devoted themselves to their families and supported their husbands and children. Because Vietnamese women absorbed how to be moral according to Confucianist beliefs, they practised their ideology of loyalty within their family and with their men as part of their lives. Courage is a Confucian characteristic for men; however, women outside the military and commercial sectors also showed this characteristic.

The Literature Review illustrated the fact that Vietnam has, over thousands of years, established and developed its customs and own beliefs in humanism based on Confucianism. These beliefs feature in concepts of virtue, such as a woman's role in a family and a man's role in society. The woman's function is to teach children and help support the husband in society. The role of the mother is to be an example of

morality. Men represent themselves as gentle, courageous and righteous in their community.

### Case study 1: artist Nguyen Minh Thanh

In his *Rice field* installation artwork, Nguyen Minh Thanh represents the role of woman through his understanding of his mother's status in his family. He appreciated his mother, who was devoted to her family and others when the country was at war prior to 1975. In the artwork, the backdrop of seven panels represents her as the Confucian mother. In *Rice field*, traditional Vietnamese women's farm clothing, represented by a painting of a light-brown shirt and black trousers in Vietnamese traditional shapes on the backdrop, together with the rice field together suggest the interrelationship of agriculture and women's status during the war.



**Figure 32: Nguyen Minh Thanh, 1999, installation art, *Rice field***

Source: Bui & Pham, 2012, p. 175

In this installation artwork, the red symbol has three meanings. First, the red colour of the rice field represents the wartime situation of women in Vietnam. It also suggests the sacrifice of men through battle, where red in this situation symbolises bloodshed. The traditional women's farm clothing stands quietly, representing the

Confucian roles of Vietnamese women. Second, the red rice field, created by grouping inverted red incense sticks on a ground of three square metres, represents rice plants. Minh Thanh explained in interview that rice and incense are traditional Vietnamese needs and are important for every family. Rice is a necessary source of food, and incense has been used for worship and ritual purposes for centuries. Incense is used to create a spiritual atmosphere. It is considered that the presence of spirits in the act of worship and rituals can increase the the believer's faith. The incense makes the believer feel that their worship is sacred and holy, but in this installation the inverted incense sticks representing rice plants create a metaphoric expression, suggesting to the viewer that Vietnamese cultural philosophy has changed. The inversion suggests a movement away from spiritual philosophy and towards superstition. This is a retrograde movement, a type of anti-belief in Tam Giao and against the teaching of Buddha. (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December)

The artist notes that this inversion symbol expresses awkwardness, and the inverted incense gives the viewer a sense of the postwar traumas. He uses this symbol to represent how Vietnamese people recover from their traumas. The nation was unable to adapt to what families needed; therefore, anxiety spread among the community and people used their superstitious beliefs to mitigate their anger. Nguyen Minh Thanh's metaphors address the anxiety and the feeling of emotional loss that in turn directed people towards superstitious beliefs. The incense becomes a metaphorical expression about the traumatising situation of people who want to improve the conditions in their lives but feel hopeless in achieving their human rights. Hence, people shifted from Tam Giao philosophy to superstitious beliefs (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December).

According to Nguyen Minh Thanh, the red of the rice field also has another meaning in that it symbolically represents communism. A lone rice field portrays the Vietnamese atmosphere after the war and its subsequent situation, and therefore the artwork expresses the outcomes of the war that have determined and changed the social and traditional beliefs in Vietnam (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December).

Nguyen Minh Thanh adopted a global installation-art method to express his opinion of specific Vietnamese social and political issues. *Rice field* shows the power of his creative instinct in the use of the traditional fashion of farming outfits to address the heroic woman-motherhood figure and reflect Confucian characteristics. He uses red as an evocative symbol and installs inverted incense sticks to give the viewer his



historical, cultural and political point of view. The declining values in culture are an aspect of the development of superstitious, and mirror the politically dominant culture of the nation (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December).

Michel Foucault (as cited in Gray, 1997, p. 258) points out that the cultural values described as 'subjugated knowledges' should be freed from political power. The current system of postmodern art or contemporary art is 'just the opposite of politic', which Foucault explains is the politics known in a world of war, which in turn points to the importance of the 'opposite of politic', such as anti-politics or the new politics, the antiwar movements or the peace movements and the other social movements of identities and issues. Foucault also points out that contemporary art shows resistance to political power, which has dominated the world. He asserts that contemporary artists should adopt the slogan 'we must be stronger' and he also comments that 'transcendence will be found in closing that gulf, not in mining it for new wars' (as cited in Gray, 1997, pp. 258–9).

Since 1995, the internet has provided information about different cultures, which has affected Vietnamese people in their use of traditional materials for artistic creations. Vietnamese culture now reflects a mixture of global cultures, creating a hybridity in cultural development in Vietnam. People show no strong desire to hold only traditional values for several reasons. First, there has been rapid development in both the commercialisation and urbanisation of the population. As a result, the community has developed new patterns of social relations, which have created changes in traditional values. Second, the desire to be wealthy has led to intensely competitive approaches in business life. Traditional values do not fit with these competitive situations. The final aspect relates to global cultural and art influences via the media, which affects Vietnamese people. As a result, the development of Vietnamese traditional culture has faced constant disruption, also reflecting the displacement caused by the fast-changing complexity of societal values. Artistic responses to these changes and the depiction of this complexity by developing the concept of humanism were initially cautious.

The humanism displayed in Vietnamese literature in earlier centuries mainly exhibited the virtue of human beings in Vietnamese society and their family relationships (as mentioned in the Literature Review). In the post-Doi Moi period, Tam Giao is less acknowledged, and people increasingly demonstrate the influence of the ideology of Western democratic culture through their behaviour in business

and through their lifestyles. Vietnamese culture is in a process of transition that reflects changes in ideas about personal identity. In the visual arts context, the controversy over values is expressed by Confucian artists through an interest in personality changes that typically reflect the new period of the transformative progress of Vietnamese culture.

Since 1995, Western democratic culture has influenced traditional Vietnamese humanist concepts, which have shifted to adapt to the new Vietnamese society. However, the traditional morality of Vietnam is based on its Tam Giao tradition and is maintained in cognitive thinking habits that create the complex cultural formation that occurs in the next phase of the nation. This will be discussed in Chapter 6. The post-Doi Moi artists represent a contradictory period of cultural change, and they have redefined the concepts of humanism by the ways in which they have analysed the changes in cultural values.

The term *cultural value* is found in Rokeach's thesis (as cited in Toth & Simanyi, 2006). He asserts that 'people are not born with their values, but form them through experiences throughout their lifetime. Values are learnt or passed from one generation to another in a society and within groups. Some values are relatively permanent, others undergo continuous change' (p. 44). Moreover, according to Fustos and Szakolczai's theory on value change, historical context is essential in analysing different views. They also note that when cultural values are in transition, society is often also in a confused situation (as cited in Toh & Simanyi, 2006, pp. 44–5).

Rokeach measures cultural values by assessing individuals. He believes that the individual level and the overarching structure in which values are formed reflect cultural values. In this case, traditional ties between the members of a society are not significant factors, and individuals become responsible for their own lives and aims (as cited in Toth & Simanyi, 2006, p. 43). Rokeach's method of identifying cultural values by assessing individuals who value their society supports my research method—namely, identifying the cultural values of Vietnam in transition through and analysis of the post-Doi Moi artists and their artworks.

## **Case study 2: artist Dinh Thi Tham Poong**

Whereas Nguyen Minh Thanh's works reflect his political point of view, Dinh Thi Tham Poong examines how Vietnamese culture adjusts economically and socially in chaotic situations. A highland artist born in 1970 in Lai Chau, Dinh Thi Tham Poong experienced both Muong culture and Thai culture from her mother and father; her study of art was also influenced by her mainstream education. These factors gave her an opportunity to create artworks. In her creative work, she is concerned about the accumulative Tam Giao values, which were forcibly transformed and mixed via traumatising situations. In her artworks she also expresses how the concepts of humanism have been changed through the cultural transformation of Vietnam. She uses symbolic metaphors in her artworks to represent how people maintain their habitual behaviour when faced with the juxtaposition of Western influences and traditional beliefs in the post-Doi Moi period. She points out that this has caused traumas in the establishment of individual identity during a process of defining a new concept of humanism.

After interviewing 20 art participants in Vietnam, I discerned a consistent change in Vietnamese cultural values during this period of transition, based on individual cases and the findings from the qualitative data. In this section, I use Dinh Thi Tham Poong's artworks to analyse how Vietnamese cultural values have changed in two fundamental aspects: economic interactions and individual identities.

In *Two half life*, produced in 2008, Dinh Thi Tham Poong represents her experiences, including her observation of Vietnamese cultural values that have shifted from Tam Giao to a new system of democratic values in this transitional period (see Figure 33a). In this artwork, she uses two human figures to present her point of view. A small sombre figure contrasts with a bigger figure that consists of an image of blue sky and clouds. A Vietnamese-Chinese eternity character has been used as a stamp and repeated on the small human figure. This stamp symbolises traditional Tam Giao individual identity. In this painting, three trees are overlaid on the human figures. On the tree trunks, the same eternity character is used but only on the areas of overlap with the human figures. These trees represent the Vietnamese Confucian phenomenon. The two figures—the Tam Giao human figure and the blue-sky-and-cloud human figure—dominate the artwork. She uses these symbols to represent how the two value systems converge in Vietnamese culture (Le 2014, pers. comm., 6 January).

In interview, Dinh Thi Tham Poong stated that the Vietnamese ego determines the entire process of their perception, which has been established through generations via individual activities and their relationships in society (Le 2014, pers., comm. 6 January). The use of Tam Giao as well as the eternity character and its repetitions on the smaller figure in *Two half life* has precise cultural meanings. In Vietnam, stamps have been used by the authorities in all official seals to indicate their status, and this is a traditional necessity. The artist uses this concept of the stamp to represent the recognition of Tam Giao character, which still remains in this changing process. The Tam Giao eternity stamp is used on the figure as a gesture of rumination (see Figure 33b). The artist shows her experiences of the current atmosphere of cultural change. This stamp also symbolises the maintenance of Vietnamese customs in the form of traditional values, with people using traditional cognitive thinking in their social interactions (Le 2014, pers. comm., 6 January; Eyerman, 2004bb, p. 161). Another meaning of the Tam Giao stamp in this work is that the traditional habits of behaviour, which have stemmed from Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, have formed the major characteristics of Vietnamese traditional identity.



**Figure 33a: Dinh Thi Tham Poong, 2010, painting, *Two half life***

Source: Bui & Pham, 2012, p. 153



**Figure 33b: Dinh Thi Tham Poong, 2010, painting (a section of *Two half life*) showing Tam Giao 'stamp' on the sombre figure**

Source: Le 2014, pers. comm., 6 January

The blue-sky-and-cloud human figure form is juxtaposed to the Tam Giao figurative image and suggests an opposite meaning. The blue-sky-and-cloud element substantially changes its forms all the time. This symbol gives the viewer an idea about the feeling of uncertainty in relying on this period of change and that, to do so, creates traumatising situations. Dinh Thi Tham Poong uses two symbolic images to represent Vietnamese Confucian culture. The Tam Giao symbolic image shows it is capable of changing itself and the blue-sky-and-cloud image is a new factor that affects these changes. The artist uses the Tam Giao stamp juxtaposed with the cloud form to narrate some issues relating to her collective identity and her experience of something new that has yet to be identified and explored. Dinh Thi Tham Poong shows the concept of Tam Giao philosophy confronting the new cultural heritage influences in a positive way. Her creativity involves her systematic representation of perceived sensory experiences. She also shows the ability to retrieve information from real life and to use the essential cultural elements to represent how the Tam Giao outlook in Vietnam has changed and how the new concept of individual identity has developed during the process of changing cultural values in this post-Doi Moi period.

In *Footprints*, 2007, a watercolour painting on dzo paper, Dinh Thi Tham Poong addresses an aspect of Vietnamese habitual behaviour that has led to a change in cultural values during the period of economic development. Habitual behaviour has been explained in Nathan Brett's research. Brett (1981) discusses the term *habit* as referring to a form of behaviour when action is automatic and states that the products of habit are not manifestations of intelligence. However, Brett also finds that habitual behaviour can be instigated from outside, and new habits can be

acquired as a way to survive. He calls this 'purposeful action', as the habits have been consciously and deliberately acquired (pp. 358–66).

In Vietnam after the war the nation had to change its habits of thinking in relation to economics and in relation to self-identity, following international influence on the nation's situation. Marr (1991) explains the forced change of Vietnamese cultural values occurred because of the demographical and environmental problems due to the population boom after the war:

After the end of the war, an incredibly ambitious plan was announced to resettle four million or more Vietnamese from North to South and from lowlands to uplands; only a fraction of that plan has been realized. The ratio of arable land per person is among the lowest in the world, 0.1 hectare per head, and getting worse each year. Wasted land and bare hills make up no less than 40 percent of the total area. (Marr, 1991, p. 19)

*Footprints* illustrates the new habits of behaviour in a new system of Vietnamese humanism (see Figure 34). According to Dinh Thi Tham Poong, she uses metaphors to express her opinions about the change of cultural values in Vietnam. She explains how the images have been used:

A cement block located in the foreground uses artificial decorative motifs that dominate *Footprints*, an image of a balcony of a building with footprint images to represent human space. The human gesture of lying down on the balcony suggests feelings of anxiety. (Le 2014, pers.com., 6 January)

Vietnamese urban development has become a huge task in the face of population growth and industrial requirements. This has become a forced habit. It reflects the need for survival rather than considered planning for the future. Ungar (1991) discusses the habits that affect Vietnamese economic development:

There is no structural mechanism to allow gradual, limited transition to a new stage and what is happening and what will continue to happen is oscillation between the boundaries inherent in the current system. The result is that one will continue to see a cycle of crackdown in this process. (Ungar, 1991, pp. 35-45)

The development in economic values has established a new cultural paradigm in Vietnam, which has been discussed in Dinh Thi Tham Poong's artwork *Footprints*: a set of values that results in trauma for Vietnamese people. A balcony, in literal terms, is an extension of a building. In *Footprints*, the artist uses the balcony image as the symbol of an extension of human space. This expansion of the idea of the balcony mutates to a familiar idea about urbanisation. The balcony extends our knowledge of the familiar meaning of a balcony into the expanding urban landscape. The human feet on the balcony also suggests human occupancy of the landscape. The symbol of the balcony suggests a disorganised Vietnamese environment in this period of urbanisation devoid of architectural planning. The impacts of these new behaviours are complex (Le 2014, pers. comm., 6 January).



**Figure 34: Dinh Thi Tham Poong, 2007, painting, *Footprints*, water colour on dzo paper**

Source: Bui & Pham, 2012, p. 152

The symbol of the balcony and the two figures above the balcony human suggest the causal relationship in Buddhism. The juxtaposed symbols represent this fundamental causal relationship (mentioned in the Literature Review). A severe problem associated with the competitive, fast urban development in Vietnam is that it invariably leads to changes in the functioning ecosystem. Another problem is the forced change in cultural values. These issues create human suffering as a result of the dire consequences of the destruction of unique natural resources. The Buddhist idea of cause and effect and its relationship to the natural world is expressed in the painting through juxtaposed symbols the two figure above the balcony that expresses feelings of anxiety. The painting represents the negative impact of human demands. According to Neal, Wood and Quinn (2006, p. 198), when a habit is established, it is performed repeatedly. Indeed, Dinh Thi Tham Poong said in interview that the sequence of destruction, urbanisation and growing desire for wealth is reflective of repeated acts of human selfishness. Brett (1981) explains that habitual behavior can be purposeful and this habit could be dealing with the question of attention, pp. 357-376). He also explains the acquisition of the habit is in such cases as this, a matter of gaining control.

Dinh Thi Tham Poong chooses a gesture that can also be read as a type of rumination that expresses stress. She addresses the negative and competitive nature of urbanisation that leads to changes in human behaviour. *Footprints* is also associated with global economic issues, which has brought the traumatising conditions to everyone.

The two artworks by Dinh Thi Tham Poong—namely, *Footprints* and *Two half life*, produced in 2010—show Vietnamese cultural values in transition in two major aspects: economic (in *Footprints*) and individual identity (in *Two half life*). Vietnamese traditional lifestyle formed a moral basis for society, but that has shifted and, therefore, contemporary moral behaviour and opinions oppose tradition, which is, in turn, judged negatively by society in Vietnam today ( Le 2014, pers. comm., 6 January).

Dinh Thi Tham Poong narrates how cultural values have shifted, creating traumatic situations, and how these conditions have affected people in the post-Doi Moi period. She wants to address how the long history of cultural habitual behaviours applies to the fast-changing world of the twenty-first century and that these fast changes are the causes of traumatising conditions in Vietnam.



Dinh Thi Tham Poong works in a contemporary style, expressing the transformations in traditional habits of thinking, caused by changes in ideas about individual identity in the new economic environment. In her art, she uses a method of juxtaposing symbols. In *Footprints*, she uses the balcony symbol with human footprints as well as the stooped human figures to show feelings of anxiety. In *Two half life*, a blue-sky-and-cloud figure is juxtaposed with the Tam Giao figurative symbol, portraying the intrinsic development of individual identity within a new, complex cultural uncertainty.

Schaefer and Moos (1998) found that people's ego-resiliency is an aspect of their personal resources, which has been linked to people's ability to adapt to life crises and transitions. They also note that people use their coping strategies as a form of adaptation and explain that cognitive coping strategies, such as focusing on positive aspects of the situation, are used to minimise life crises. In this way, people try to find meaning in their situation and gain some sense of control over it (p. 115).

Sztompka's (2004) research finds that individuals respond in different ways to cultural trauma. He also adopts the classical model that Robert K Merton formulated in 1938 (as cited in Sztompka, 2004, p. 167) for coping with cultural trauma and discusses four types of cultural trauma adaptation: innovation, rebellion, ritualistic reaction, and retreatism. Innovation often takes various forms; it may target culture directly through socialisation and contributes to the redefinition of a cultural disagreement. Rebellion indicates a more radical approach in order to replace the traumatic condition with a new cultural set-up. A ritualistic reaction involves reestablishing traditions and routines. Retreatism involves ignoring trauma and acting as if trauma did not exist (as cited in Sztompka, 2004, pp. 167–8).

In the post–Doi Moi period, the work of the group of artists that I have identified represents Vietnamese people expressing themselves in cultural transition and is an example of the *innovation* type of culture trauma adaptation. These artworks are representative of how Vietnamese artists use strategies to cope with the cultural changes caused by the traumatic economic growth in Vietnam. The second section of this chapter presented the case-study of Dinh Thi Tham Poong who addresses two different aspects of Vietnamese culture: economic and individual values in this transitional period. The following section presents the case-study of artist Vu Dinh Tuan, who explores how individuals cope with cultural trauma associated with

economic growth. In the two series of artworks (comprising eight female images, each on a woodcut print measuring 110 cm x 40 cm), the artist presents strategies for coping with Vietnamese cultural traumas.

### Case study 3: artist Vu Dinh Tuan

Vu Dinh Tuan was born in 1973 in Thai Binh. During high school, he was selected as a member of the gifted and talented students who specialised in Vietnamese literature; he participated in national competitions and won several awards. In 2000, he completed his studies at the Vietnam University of Fine Arts and became a lecturer at the same university. In interview he said that *The four beauties* folk artwork (see Figure 35a) hung in his house when he was a child and that he appreciated the traditional aesthetic of this artwork both in terms of its literary narrative and its visual presentation. He stated, 'changes are needed to the traditional concept of aesthetics to suit our new concept of the current tradition' (Le 2014, pers. comm., 6 January). He commented that aim of the traditional costuming used in *The four beauties* was to identify feudalism or Tam Giao culture in terms of habitual behaviour that is now out of fashion and that society has subsequently adopted new values of social behaviour.



**Figure 35a: Vietnamese Hang Trong folk art, *The four beauties*, woodcut printing**

Source: Hoang, 1995, p. 80

In two series entitled *Lady I-II-III-IV* (see Figure 35b) and *Lady V, Lady VI, Lady VII, Lady VIII* (see Figure 36), Vu Dinh Tuan presents his opinions about the current transition of post-Doi Moi culture and refers in particular to changes in aesthetic beliefs (Le 2014, pers. comm., 14 January). In the first series of four artworks, Vu Dinh Tuan represents the changing concept of beauty, from a feudalist to a post-

Doi Moi context. The exposed figures contrast with traditional clothing, providing the viewer with a background about this subject matter in his work. The second series of artworks portrays the process of change in Vietnamese aesthetics in the current visual arts. Vu Dinh Tuan uses fragmented female forms, transfiguring traditional notions to represent his subject matter.

The four images in *Lady I-II-III-IV*, 2009, portray how people adapt to changing ideologies in the context of cultural transition in Vietnam. The artist adopts *The four beauties* folk artwork of Vietnam, but he changes them, portraying the clothing as transparent, thereby revealing the full female figure and suggesting a new aesthetic concept. This new concept contrasts with traditional paradigms of beauty by portraying the four figures using a new art style. Vu Dinh Tuan uses simile to depict the change of aesthetics central to this subject matter. *Lady I-II-III-IV* begins with a Vietnamese hand-fan symbolising the traditional opening of a story in Vietnamese literature. The hand-fan appeared in many famous Vietnamese literary works in this way. For example, in the fourteenth century, author Ho Xuan Huong used such a hand-fan in the opening of her poem *Cái Quạt* and the fairytale story *Tấm Cám*. The fans in Vu Dinh Tuan's artworks have bird and flower printed motifs, which are not related to Vietnamese traditional art. He 'opens' his visual narrative story with the use of a global art motif on the traditional hand-fan symbol. The four female images are depicted as musicians or performers. They are dressed in the formal traditional clothing often seen in festivals or rituals. The Tam Giao stamp seals on their costumes identify their Vietnamese cultural heritage. Vu Dinh Tuan also composes the near-nude bodies to contrast with the traditional artefacts (fan, shoes and dress) as an erotic fantasy, giving the viewer a sense of the impact of global art influences. However, Vu Dinh Tuan uses a conceptual art style such as showing both the nude bodies and the traditional dresses together, an approach that lends itself to a reading about artists seeking their own individual style and freedom. Tam Giao is now less important to individuals (Le 2014, pers. comm., 14 January).

The first series, *Lady I-II-III-IV*, shows how the post-Doi Moi group of artists who come from a background in Tam Giao culture and Confucian social practice are deeply conscious of Vietnam's transitional culture. The near-nude image is used as a figurative symbol and as a 'vehicle' in the context of cultural transition to allude to the change in traditional aesthetic concepts.



**Figure 35b: Vu Dinh Tuan, 2009, print, *Lady I-II-III-IV*, woodcut prints**

Source: Bui & Pham, 2012, p. 201

Traditionally, shoes are worn for walking; however, in *Lady I-II-III-IV*, the artist places the Vietnamese traditional shoe symbol in front of the ladies, who instead have bare feet for performing their tasks. This behaviour is not a Vietnamese custom because traditional shoes are used for festivals or formal events when people perform in public. However, in this artwork, these performers have taken off their shoes, suggesting the shoes are unsuitable for the performance. The artist uses the shoe metaphorically to show a change in habitual behaviour.

The shoe becomes a symbol suggesting a strategy for encompassing the global art movement. Vu Dinh Tuan positioned the shoes in front of the performers to create a sense of absurdity. The performers in this artwork represent post-Doi Moi artist attitudes. As Vu Dinh Tuan noted, 'we respect our traditional culture, but it is time for exploring different ways to work in a new art-perspective in Vietnam' (Le, 2014, pers. comm., 14 January). The faces of the performers have no details; however, traditional masks lurk among the performers. The blank forms of the human faces suggest they have no identity. Thus, these two facial symbols link together to become the central metaphor of identity and to portray the increasing cultural trauma in Vietnam. The masks represent the traditional spirit, which still remains and still influences the artist (Le 2014, pers. comm., 14 January). These symbolic images suggest the dominant cultural values underlying human perception are

being challenged by the habitual behaviour of Vietnamese people. They need to modify these habits if they are to have the freedom to develop new perspectives.

In the second series of artworks, *Lady V*, *Lady VI*, *Lady VII*, *Lady VIII*, 2009, the artist exposes the typical Vietnamese sequence of cultural trauma in this period. The artwork's composition is the same as that of the first series, but the traditional outfits and shoes have disappeared, and the performers are in the process of transforming into different creatures. Simile—specifically the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly—is used to portray his subject matter. Vu Dinh Tuan said that for a caterpillar to become a butterfly is an obligation, and this notion forms the basis of this series of works. Using a complementary simile that alludes to hatching, the artist applies a cubist style to depict cracked and broken figures. The oval shapes that replace the shoes of the first series are sharp-pointed and coloured with triangular patterns. The shoes have transformed into oval shapes following the metamorphosis process. Vu Dinh Tuan uses a traditional expression from Vietnamese folk literature as an analogue: 'If I knew I would be in this miserable situation, I would rather be a bird, for a better life' (Le 2014, pers. comm., 14 January).

In the background of each artwork is a dark area that includes a shadowy human figure, suggesting a disquieting situation. In real life, people often retreat to a comfortable dark area when they need to reduce their feelings of anxiety. However, the dark area in this work includes a sombre male figure lurking in an unknown space, further suggesting an unsafe environment.

By using geometric shapes to create a feeling of pain, Vu Dinh Tuan presents an intrinsic metaphoric expression of cultural transition. He also uses analogy to express the pain of the artist's feelings in response to the transitioning into new forms, or the hatching of a new era, in Vietnamese culture. In the depiction of the heads, butterfly patterns and shark teeth portray this metamorphosis. The evocative power of this visual metaphor derives from the tensions created by the contradiction between butterfly wings and shark teeth, images of which form the heads of the performers. This creates a feeling of anxiety, reinforced through the weak, broken pieces of the bodies and the strong, bizarre facial expressions. This ambiguous central metaphor aims to portray the suffering experienced in the process of transitioning. The artist expresses his feelings of uncertainty but shows some strategies to cope with the phenomenon of transition. Vu Dinh Tuan uses

metamorphosis to suggest the movement of Vietnamese traditional art as it evolves from old to new and from nationalism to internationalism (Le 2014, pers. comm., 14 January).



**Figure 36: Vu Dinh Tuan, 2009, print, *Lady V, Lady VI, Lady VII, Lady VIII*, wood cut prints**

Source: Bui & Pham, 2012

In the two series of artworks, structural metaphor has been used to depict the pain of adapting to the transition taking place in the visual arts and how artists cope with this complex situation. In the second series, the artist has used contrasting metaphorical methods to represent the situation in this period. Simile has been used to compare the weakness of insecurity with the charade of strength in the process of change, the first represented by the broken bodies and the latter by the vicious heads. The structural organisation of *Lady V-VI-VII-VIII* portrays anxiety, and provides the viewer with how the artist is coping with the situation. The viewer can see that cultural values have shifted through the use of different cultural knowledges, not a single knowledge, led by an awareness of international art.



Smith (2011, pp. 10–13) explains that international art in the contemporary era comes from modernism and that contemporary artists come from three different centres—Euro-America, the West and the rest of the world—related to economic, political and cultural development. From these controlling centres, visual artists explore their subject matter within local environments. They also explore how their sense of identity relates to others in their exploration of their search for themselves. Smith (2011) also notes that contemporary artists are living in a condition of permanent transition because of the severe disruption to their internal, community-defining processes.

According to Bui and Pham (2012, pp. 9–15), the contemporary art of Vietnam reflects the same transition as the international community. There are three different groups in this post-Doi Moi period in Vietnam. The first is a group of artists who had colonial art training in the Indochina period between 1945 and 1954. They showed their interest in using conservative art styles as the mainstream art of Vietnam (see Contextual Background). The second group of artists (1954–75) explored how to create artwork using Vietnamese traditions and pursued their art under traditional Vietnamese culture. Bui Nhu Huong (Bui, 2007, pp. 70–80) notes that the third group of artists rejected these two ideologies and showed their opposition to the above methods in their creative expression. In interview in 2003, Bui Nhu Huong emphasised that these artists were born and bred in an environment of changing Vietnamese culture, which had a strong impact on the change in the whole communist system. Therefore, they were freed from the previously restrictive educational system and now use international networks effectively for their artistic development. These artists have to cope with their ideas contradicting those of earlier groups, who still dominate in the visual arts of Vietnam. These three groups create different ideas within Vietnamese heritage (Le 2013, pers. comm., 7 January).

Artists of this period can access several democratic markets, which gives them the opportunity to be successful and achieve international recognition without the influence of the local authorities. These artists often receive direct invitations from art auctions and from international curators to participate in exhibitions. This newly democratic context stimulates these artists, who want to adapt to a new democratic cultures.

#### **Case study 4: artist Ly Tran Quynh Giang**

Ly Tran Quynh Giang is a member of this group of artists who uses her point of view to depict the cultural traumas affecting individuals in Vietnam. Quynh Giang has to cope with making art in an international art style conflicts with the two dominant art styles in Vietnam. Her artworks reflect her pain of isolation and her cynicism about her environment. *A gang*, 2010, *Hello my bird*, 2011, and *Untitled*, 2014, collectively show her artistic outlook and expressive style. *A gang* and *Untitled* have been influenced by German Expressionism, especially the works of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. The viewer can also link her painting style to similar processes used by Albert Tucker and Arthur Boyd in Australian modernist art. Her artwork excludes Vietnamese traditional art resources. Quynh Giang was born in Hanoi in 1973. She passed entrance exams to study law in a university in Hanoi; however, she decided to move to the visual arts, and in 1997 she passed entrance exams to the Vietnam University of Fine Arts, where she completed was awarded her bachelor degree in 2002. The sources that influence her art include various international authors; Charles Darwin, the British naturalist and geologist; and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the Colombian author of *One hundred years of solitude*.

*A gang* is an oil painting (135 cm x 135 cm) that shows two human head figures among many avians faces in a constricted space (see Figure 37). All eyes are huge and directed towards the viewer, creating an intensely severe atmosphere. The use of greens and black dominate the artwork; the surrounding eyes show a sense of cynicism, and no warmth is depicted. The artist creates two kinds of creatures—human and avian—depicting the same cynical behaviour, expressed through the use of eyes and crowded gestures. the eyes of all the animals and humans are directed towards the viewer, none towards each other, suggesting there has been no communication between them. The eyes in this artwork identify the characters, which appear to pay the viewer an increasing amount of attention. This painting method appears to depart from traditional aesthetics. Using colours and brush strokes combining expressionist and modernist styles, Ly Tran Quynh Giang places a strong emphasis on feelings and emotional sensibility. Each strained and pressed body represents the mind and soul. Not having any communication with each other conveys an atmosphere of distrust. The black lines and distinct brushstrokes communicate the complex feelings of each individual and of the whole group, emphasising the framework of the composition. This work of art depicts a



competitive situation suggestive of The Cold War. A *gang* shows the cynicism individuals have for each other.



**Figure 37: Ly Tran Quynh Giang, 2010, painting, *A gang*, oil on canvas**

Source: Bui & Pham, 2012, p. 88

Quynh Giang depicts her environment and the competition between individuals and groups in the community, highlighting personal identity problems under the current system in Vietnam. This artwork also shows her passion for using different kinds of representational practices and for moving away from traditional cultural paradigms to express new Vietnamese personal identities.

Another artwork by Quynh Giang, *Hello my bird*, 2011, is a wooden sculpture (30 cm x 90 cm x 30 cm) that depicts a dead human, named 'My Bird' (see Figure 38). The content aims to portray the isolation of an individual from the Vietnamese environment (Le 2014, pers. comm., 8 January). This artwork consists of a wooden block with a carved human head, with no hands and with two feet. The bird has been placed in a coffin, and by saying 'hello' to her bird (the title revealed this), the artist shows her ability to imagine contrast: death and life in the same situation effectively staging an invitation for communication.



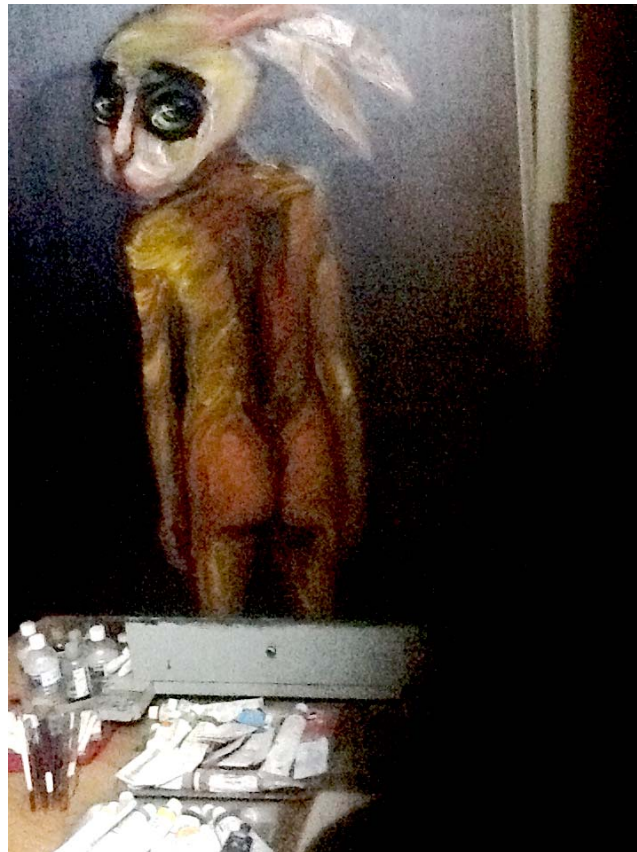
**Figure 38: Ly Tran Quynh Giang, 2011, sculpture, *Hello my bird*, wood**

Source: Bui & Pham, 2012, p. 88

*Hello my bird* shows a combination of two visual and verbal effects: the dead body of 'My Bird' and the message 'hello' that suggest the reality of death and the illusion of a lonely life. In this case, the artist uses her sense of humour to depict new individual identities in the current culture. She transforms the subject matter of individual isolation into her own way of expression by means of a dead body and the communication to herself. The literal meaning creates an absurd contrast in a living person (the artist) saying 'hello' to a dead one ('my bird' equates with 'my spirit'). Here the artist expands the meaning of physical suffering and mental agony through the bird symbol, which represents part of her. *Hello my bird* can be viewed from several perspectives: as a form of humour about her fears—of her bird, her inner feelings; as bitter sarcasm—the artist is amused by the represented dead body through which she recognises her inner feelings; or as mystery—she creates this artwork because of the lack of communication between herself and the environment.

Quynh Giang responds to the Vietnamese art climate of the post-Doi Moi period, and shows how she feels through her works. She shows her pain during this transition period in the visual arts. Quynh Giang refers to herself as an international

artist who is working towards her sense of identity. Her artwork reflects being isolated from local power.



**Figure 39: Ly Tran Quynh Giang, 2014, painting. *Untitled***

Source: Le 2014, pers. comm., 8 January

Her latest work *Untitled* (produced in 2014 using oil on a canvas measuring 135 cm x 135 cm) shares the same ideas, and she continues to work on the same subject matter (see Figure 37). During the last three years (2010–13), her artworks have provided the viewer with her principles concerning her expression. In *Untitled* she embraces her global art style through the use of strong solid brushwork with earthy colours that include oranges and dark red-brown to identify her emotions. The only figure depicted in *Untitled* stands, looking over its shoulder at the viewer, and cries with miserable eyes. The artist's intention is to give precedence to colours close to each other in the spectrum to give stronger emphasis to the depiction of isolation. This artwork speaks out for this group of artists, showing the painful loneliness that is created through cultural trauma. The pain of the transitional period in this cultural environment is sometimes too deep or too extensive to heal.

## Summary

The artworks of the four artists discussed in this chapter narrate the post–Doi Moi period. They reveal the unpredictability of the period and the impossibility of eliminating anxiety from the sense of individual self. In *Rice field*, 2008, Nguyen Minh Thanh uses rural and agricultural symbols, including inverted incense sticks, to show the viewer a Vietnamese historical, cultural and political point of view. He observes that declining cultural values are an aspect of the development of superstitious minds and mirror the declining strength of the nation (Le 2012, pers. comm., 27 December).

The two artworks by Dinh Thi Tham Poong, *Footprints* and *Two half life* (2010), show Vietnamese cultural values in transition in two major aspects: in economic terms (in *Footprints*) and in the context of individual identity (in *Two half life*). The works show how cultural values easily change in the new democratic economy compared with the process of transition in Vietnamese beliefs. The Vietnamese traditional lifestyle forms a moral basis for a society that has slowly shifted. Contemporary moral behaviours and opinions oppose tradition, which, says Dinh, is now judged negatively by society in Vietnam and reflects the development of new individual identities (Le 2014, pers. com., 6 January).

Vu Dinh Tuan uses Vietnamese metaphors and applies new concepts in a cubist style to show his idea of how aesthetic concepts have changed dramatically from feudalism or Tam Giao thought to democratic development in Vietnam today. In his two series *Lady I-II-III-IV* and *Lady V, Lady VI, Lady VII, Lady VIII*, he presents his opinions about the current transition of cultural and aesthetic beliefs in the post–Doi Moi period.

Quynh Giang's artworks illustrate how cultural contradiction affects her life, and she shows the contemporary atmosphere of cynicism when she replaces Vietnamese traditional art with her democratic ideology, thereby contradicting Vietnamese cultural heritage. The way she represents her subject matter in an expressionist style mixed with modernism underscores the contradiction in Vietnamese cultural heritage and shows how she is determined to work through this complication. According to Smith (2011, pp. 10–12), in the area of contemporary art, there is internal pain in each local community.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has represented the many ways that post-Doi Moi artists have depicted the transition in Vietnamese culture. Their art reflects the impact of Vietnamese structural traumas. The four artists under discussion also represent the contradiction of Vietnamese cultural sensibility, the result of anxiety produced not only by Vietnamese communism but also by the pressure of fast-changing international art concepts. In this sense, the artworks show how these artists explore problems of cultural trauma in various contexts, which in turn demonstrates the experience of their unique sense of Vietnamese identity. It portrays the complexity of Vietnam in the postwar period and demonstrates how Vietnam is reshaping social and economic belief systems in this period of national transition.

## **Chapter 6:**

# **The Traumatic Sequence and the Overcoming of Cultural Traumas in Vietnam Since 2005**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will examine how Vietnamese artists represent themselves in the period of overcoming their traumas during the last stages of the traumatic sequence, as discussed in the Literature Review. Discussion of the three aspects that have contributed to the traumatic sequence in Vietnam since 2005 will be organised into three sections.

The first section will address an aspect of the symptom of internal traumatic responses experienced by thousands of families whose relatives went to war and who continue to suffer because the bodies of their relatives are still missing. This is particularly stressful because of their belief system. These feelings were kept hidden during the 30 years following the end of the war. Such traumatic feelings come not only from the event itself (the Vietnam War) but also from the anxiety associated with repressing their feelings for 30 years. Since 2005, the community has shown that these emotions cannot be ignored as revealed in the journalism of Hoang Anh Suong (Hoang, 2008b). Responding to the concerns of the community, the Vietnamese Government publicly announced the need to locate the relatives of those whose bodies are still missing. Artist Truong Tan will be the case study for the first section, which analyses how collective memory and collective identity have been represented in the visual arts, and how the Vietnam War traumas affect the nation and every individual.

The second section will examine how Vietnamese people adapt to the complex and subtle situations of their traumatic conditions, and the strategies they have used to adapt to the social traumatic sequence. Vietnamese social art activists present these issues through performance and installation art. These new art forms show how Vietnamese society employs various strategies to cope with the complex and deep expression of trauma. Dao Anh Khanh will be the case study for the second section, which emphasises how the artist as an activist uses his performance and

installation art as tools to represent his subject matter. The typical Taoist approach to memory and identity is narrated and expressed in his art in action.

The third section of this chapter will examine the conflicts in Vietnamese social movements and the role of feudalism and communism in Vietnamese culture. This section will also examine the overcoming of trauma through the complex development of the visual arts. The third trend in the visual arts was born during this period. The positive overcoming of trauma in this period provides stimulating and mobilising factors; however, these factors have also brought to society a more complex understanding of the way in which the Vietnamese Tam Giao culture has had to cope with fast-changing phenomena. This section will also examine why Vietnamese culture has been so strongly affected by globalisation in the twenty-first century. Since 2005, the Vietnamese economic boom has brought many opportunities to artists who want to participate in the international free market system and to develop their art concepts free of the two dominant trends—the Vietnamese art academy and the post-Đổi Mới groups. The group of artists who represent this third trend completely rejects the concepts of art held by the two other visual arts trends. Strategies for overcoming trauma will become more complex; some will have to deal with the fast-changing culture through different contexts while others will have to cope with the returning internal trauma. Duong Thuy Lieu will be the case study for the third section.

### **Internal trauma returns to the community**

This first section will examine the cause of internal trauma and explains how Vietnamese people use Buddhist-Taoist beliefs to mitigate trauma. In this way the voices of individuals and the wider community were heard by the government and their traumatic, internal, family war experiences were addressed. The popularity of Taoist beliefs will also be explained.

Statistics show that 100,000 bodies remain missing after the Vietnam War, and this has caused deep psychological anxiety to many Taoist families, as discussed in the Literature Review. The collective feelings of loss ran deep and silently during the 30 years from 1975 to 2005 when the whole nation was devastated by the war. People had to work resiliently to survive the anguish and physical environments after the war while keeping their ever-painful scars hidden within. After 2005, when the chaotic economy was more settled, the trauma of missing relatives became a

significant issue. The Vietnamese Government allowed the press to announce the use of Taoist psychics who had a special sense that enabled them to locate the missing bodies. This had not been officially approved in the past. In 2005, the Vietnamese Government also decided to establish a centre specifically for reducing the psychological traumas caused by the Vietnam War. Hoang (2008a) interviewed a former psychology lecturer in Vietnam, Phan Anh, who established the centre using the Taoist belief system and who later added a department for the study of human special senses in order to solve postwar psychological problems. A new subject, as evidenced by the *Human potential study* in 1997, was established, focusing on Taoist psychoanalysis (Hoang 2008b) (see Appendix 28). The government accepted the nation's desire to develop this centre with the involvement of a group of Taoist psychics who practised this form of spirituality using Taoist methodology. The government acknowledged that the needs of individuals to locate their missing loved ones demonstrated that traumas from the Vietnam War continued to run deep in people's minds.

The 17 reports by Hoang Anh Suong, a Hanoi journalist specialising in crime investigation for *The Youth News*, described how Taoist psychics had successfully located missing bodies from the war. His reports brought the community to attention (Le 2014, pers. comm., 22 April). He was allowed to publish these reports in a series of four books in 2008 (see Appendix 29). These reports were based on his interviews with the victims of the war in association with a number of family members who had tried in their own ways to find their missing loved ones. He found that people eventually lose their capacity to remain silent about their grief. Hoang (2008a, 2008b) provided eloquent and detailed stories of the amount effort people expended to find their missing dead relatives. One needs to understand that in a Tam Giao nation, the most important belief is for the family to have the graves of its ancestors. Hoang Anh Suong also stated in interview that in accordance with Taoist beliefs a family needs to look after the dead spirits by maintaining their graves. Taoists are unable to live happily if a relative's body or grave is missing. According to their beliefs, each has to share their guilt and their responsibility and, correspondingly, share their portion of forthcoming bad luck. A consequence of this belief was that once the economy eventually began to settle around 2000, psychological problems for many Vietnamese families began to surface. The Vietnamese media subsequently began to guide their audiences on how to reduce their trauma (Hoang, 2008a, 2008b; Le 2014, pers. comm., 22 April).



Caruth (1995a, p. 4) describes memory of psychological trauma as an 'infectious disease' (as discussed in the Literature Review), and this has been recognised by the Vietnamese Government, which is now using a range of solutions to heal these wounds. The Taoist methodology has been used as a solution or a strategy to cope with and reduce war trauma. The demands for resolution and the government's acknowledgement of those demands demonstrate the pain of transition during the postwar period. Vietnam now has to confront both its war traumas and cultural change, which shows the impact of global art and media on social change. These elements help to create a new social formation in the contemporary environment, which creates a distinctive character in regard to Vietnamese cultural trauma in this postwar period.

As a journalist, Hoang Anh Suong investigated the two interconnected parties dealing with the loss of loved ones: the families and the Taoist psychics. The traumatic symptoms of the 'infectious disease' developed quickly over the last 10 years. In one of Hoang Anh Suong's 17 special reports is an interview with Professor Tran Phuong whose sister was killed in the Vietnam War and her body was still missing. Professor Tran Phuong is a former deputy prime minister and former chancellor of the University of Economic and Business in Hanoi. In the report by Hoang (2008a), Professor Tran Phuong, a scientist, said he never believed in Taoism or 'magic', which he claimed had no logical basis in a human understanding of life. In his house, he had never had an altar or incense. When the press reported the discovery of some bodies missing from the war, his hidden problem—related to the intimate mental injury caused by the loss of his sister—was exposed. Professor Tran Phuong decided to ask a Taoist psychic to find his sister's body, which they did. Professor Tran Phuong and his family went through the process and identified the body of his sister with sufficient accuracy using forensics. Eventually, as a result of this process, he was found contentment, and it was a happy ending for his family (Hoang, 2008b, pp. 88–118). Hoang Anh Suong also interviewed a former general, Tran Do, in 2008. Tran Do had a sister who had participated in the Anti-French Resistance War and who had died in Hoa Lo Prison in Hanoi 60 years earlier. Psychics located her body after a long investigation. This account by Hoang Anh Suong gives the reader a powerful impression of Tran Do's traumatic memory that had stayed with him for more than 60 years and remained vivid in the memories of his relations. These two reports by Hoang Anh Suong provide examples of the social structural and individual elements of trauma, which are, however, not to be confused with cultural trauma. However, psychological trauma, which relates to the

individual elements of trauma, contributes to the social creation of cultural facts, which, together with individuals, serves to influence the cultural trauma system.

This strong symptom (the need for the recognition of anxiety) shows a tear in the social fabric of Vietnamese society, with these traumas now being acknowledged publicly and in the media after 30 years of silence. This symptom, which affects Vietnamese people both mentally and physically, is being expressed through grief, with the community directly requesting action resolve this deep depression. Alexander (2004) defines this symptom in this way: '[O]nly after two or even three decades of repression and denial were people finally able to begin to talk about what happened and to take actions in response to this knowledge' (p. 201). This progressive narrative on identity has been depicted by Vietnamese artists.

This symptom of the trauma of war is evidence that wounds from the war cannot be suppressed. This symptom needs to be understood through the study of memories in human behaviour, Eyerman (2004b) note:

'Three types of memories—namely, habitual, narrated and traumatic: (1) habitual memories are those taken for granted, rules that guide everyday practices, which were learned in childhood, and much-later behaviour; (2) narrated memories are reflected human emotions subjectively 'surrounded by an emotional aura that ... makes them memorable'; (3) traumatic memories are the painful resurfacing of events of a traumatic nature", (Eyerman, 2004b, p. 168).

In this examination, the focus is on Type 2—narrated memories—which will be referenced in order to understand how much Vietnamese people have suffered and why they still adhere to their memories of the war outcomes. The way in which collective memory functions, as Eyerman (2004a) explains, is that collective memory works in a group of people. He describes collective memory as group-based and subject to adjustment according to the historical and cultural settings in which we live. He also explains that collective memory develops in different situations when social groups are able to act on their collective identity. There are differences among groups experiencing the same traumatic event, which reflect their various political, ethnic, cultural and religious roots and their geographic origins (Eyerman, 2004a, p. 69).

The terms *collective memory* and *collective identity* have been explained by Alexander (2004) through his research on cultural trauma, where he observed that the victim is often re-remembering the collective past. His or her memory not only reflects social consequences but is also deeply connected to the contemporary sense of self. Collective identities are the traumatic consequences continuously constructed and secured not only by facing the present and future but also by the reconstruction of earlier life (Alexander, 2004, p. 22).

Eyerman (2004a) explains how to recognise the collective memory found in later generations. Here the focus is on memory in relation to groups of people and cultural artefacts. He also examined the symbolic reconstruction of the Spanish civil war and found that 'collective memory doesn't only exist in the individuals but that in fact it is located in cultural artifacts' (p. 81). When any given context of cultural formation in the visual arts needs to be highlighted in an analysis, one needs to understand how a social group symbolically reconstructs the past in order to confront traumatic events for which it is responsible in the present. Eyerman (2004a) also discusses how collective memory transcends physical reality and is spread across the world with its identity-forming collective memory remaining apparently intact. In making his argument, he cites survey-based research by Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott in 1989, which investigated the later generations who shape the actions of individuals through their memories of the event. Eyerman (2004a) also cites Karl Mannheim's theory of generations, in which he explains that different age groups possess social and cultural heritage differences in their memories of the event. According to Mannheim, a generational memory consists of a record of, and a reaction to, events through age groups between the ages of 12 and 25 when people shape their 'new world' and set the framework that will guide their actions and responses for their entire existence. Mannheim emphasised that different age groups who may encounter the events bring different experiences. He also proposed that events experienced during adolescence are those most likely to 'stick' in the memory and to influence behaviour throughout life (as cited in Eyerman, 2004a, p. 70). These observations are evident in the work of the artist Truong Tan.

### **Case study: artist Truong Tan**

Truong Tan's artworks represent how collective memory works and how his collective identity has been used creatively. Born in 1963 in Hanoi, he was a former

lecturer in fine arts at the Vietnam University of Fine Arts, Hanoi. He became a full-time artist in 1999 and is now working in Hanoi and Paris (Bui & Pham, 2012, pp. 16, 162). Truong Tan, one of the pioneer performance-installation artists in Vietnam, has combines new art disciplines to construct new works of art and to express his concerns to his community. In each of his artworks—for example, in *Migrating birds*, 2003, and *Spiders*, 2004—he addresses a tangled world that re-creates Vietnamese socialist problems concerning personal identity (see Appendix 30). This case study will not examine his performance art and its development during this period; rather, it will concentrate on an examination of how he uses collective memory and his collective identity to express his political point of view. The case study will explain why his memory of war trauma lies dormant and resurfaces several decades later in his life.

Truong Tan's art reflects Tam Giao's philosophical emphasis on Buddhist-Taoist beliefs. *Thang Thang* and *Illusion*, 2011, each measure 80 cm x 250 cm and were exhibited in Bui Gallery, Hanoi (see Figure 40). He represents his traumatic experience in *Thang Thang*. The symbol of mother and child in *Thang Thang* represents the Taoist Mother Nature figure, which serves to express the artist's opinion about the political issues in Vietnam during the Vietnam War, pre-1975. The second artwork entitled *Illusion* is related to a story about the people in his village who loved to play the unconventional game called *tổ tôm* that has 119 cards. The *tổ tôm* game, which originated from Japan or China, did not belong to the tradition of Vietnamese playing-card games. His story (below) provides an idea of how collective identity has been represented by this Tam Giao member in Vietnam:

One day when the elder of village was playing with these cards, the artist was enjoying watching them moving up and down, he suddenly saw an image of a mother and child who were rising up over from a red card in front of him. The mother was holding her baby in her arms. She had only one leg that she shared with her baby. He said that this mother calmly looked up to see him, she looked like an angel, her eyes meeting Truong Tan who was as an admirer. The baby looked comfortable, drinking milk from the mother's breast. 'The mother looks differently to the people in my village', Truong Tan remarks. He remembers that a few minutes later, the mother and the child disappeared from Truong Tan's view. The artist grew up with this image in his head. In a few decades later, this mother and child image reappeared clearer in his mind when he was in his studio and in his room. He then

captured it carefully on paper and developed this into his artwork entitled *Thang Thang*. The *Illusion* installation artwork depicts the *tổ tôm* playing card game ( Bui Gallery, 2011, p. 8).

The artist remembered this image, atypical in his village, and imagined that was a mother, but she appeared different from the people who were surrounding him. At that time, Truong Tan was 7 to 13 years old (1970–75) and the Vietnam War was in its last phases. The artist Nguyen Minh Thanh (see Chapter 4) recognised that most villages had no healthy men; they had all joined the military to fight in the war. In the villages, there were only women with children, men with disabilities and old people. Truong Tan picked up the atmosphere of wartime when he was a child. His collective memories were also formed by wartime media imagery. Those memories, in turn, strongly influenced the image of the mother and child emerging from the card game. Giesen (2004, p. 113) has identified that only later, after a period of latency, can trauma can be remembered, worked through and spoken of. In Truong Tan's case, he was reconciled with his wartime trauma after three decades.

Poverty and hunger were two features of rural life during and after the war. These circumstances formed Truong Tan's memory. In the first of the two works, *Thang Thang*, he uses the image of a foreign mother to address the wartime national issue of shortages. Vietnam's war economy was unable to produce many products, and all basic needs were provided for via imported goods. Truong Tan uses the foreign mother to symbolise Mother Nature and uses the child to symbolise the Vietnamese people. Mother Nature, however, is a person with a disability who shares her one leg with the child as she breastfeeds. On a literal level, Mother Nature is portrayed in a dangerous situation because of the poor circumstances. There is a mood of emptiness in the background, except for a scattering of red dots. Truong Tan uses this mother's foreign image (he admitted that the mother looked different from his people in his report) as a Taoist metaphor for war, and uses the image to allude to the political purposes of that time. In the second work, *Illusion*, Truong Tan uses the structure of a *tổ tôm* game and explains that this international game does not really belong to Vietnam. At the same time, Truong Tan uses simile to allude to the cause of the Vietnam War. The two groups of playing cards form two fan-shaped hands in the upper and lower sections (the hand-fan symbol has been used for opening a story, as explained by Vu Dinh Tuan, cited in Chapter 5). All the other cards in the two groups are heading towards each other: north and south. The two groups in the

*tổ tôm* game are a vehicle, in the figurative sense, for Truong Tan to allude to the two political centres in Vietnam during the war.



Figure 40: Truong Tan, 2011, painting and installation art, *Thang Thang* and *Illusion*, mixed media

Source: Bui Gallery, 2011

Using complex Tam Giao metaphors and similes, Truong Tan represents two opposing military forces using their soldiers to go into battle. The cards and the game symbolise both the politics of the Northern and Southern armies and the international soldiers who also went to war and killed each other. In his art, Truong Tan does not realistically depict violence or human figures to express his concerns about war. Instead, he uses a Buddhist and Taoist manner to show how the political purposes, cynically decided on by the leaders during the Vietnam War, were enacted. He uses subtle visual clues to unravel the cynical policy-making process during the war. The viewer might notice the dark-blue plate that holds the discarded cards, on the left-hand side. This plate seems alien to the scene, but it represents the 'disabled' cards or dead soldiers who took part in the battles between the North and the South. The blue plate metaphorically highlights the involvement of an international army. This is suggested via this artefact's unconventionality both in colour and motif design and the fact that it gathers together—out of the main game—that which one does not wish to face.

The art of aesthetic expression, the use of visual metaphors and the ways in which these are variously used by Western and Asian artists have been raised in Chapter 2. Artists use these methods depending upon their cultural and social contexts. In this way, artists may represent similar themes, but the visual expressions may differ, as may their aesthetic appeal. Picasso's *Guernica* (see figure 5) reveals European metaphors and methods just as Truong Tan's *Thang Thang* and *Illusion* reveal Vietnamese Tam Giao philosophical influences. The viewer is unable to find any realistic depictions of place or violence because of Truong Tan's life-long Buddhist experience and, in terms of the content of these pieces, his Buddhist philosophical outlook. It is telling to compare Truong Tan's work with Otto Dix's *The skat players*, 1920. Dix was a German soldier and war artist who used three figures to address the reality of World War I and its aftermath (see Appendix 32). In Otto Dix's artwork, the meaning of war is obviously depicted by using realist, injured and disabled human figures portraying the war's outcomes. While Dix addresses how the war's traumatic experiences affected individual human psychology, Truong Tan's artwork shows the impact of war on the level of national psychological trauma. Both artists portray the impact on soldiers and participants who became victims through the betrayal of their efforts to honour political purposes. The two artists address these issues differently through their different cultures and aesthetic expression. While Otto Dix uses European philosophy, Truong Tan represents the issues of the

Vietnam War using Tam Giao philosophy and metaphors. Truong Tan depicts his subject matter through the lens of two key Buddhist approaches. The first relates to the Buddhist philosophy of right knowledge, not gaining knowledge (Irons, 2008, p. xvi). Truong Tan's critical analysis objectively identifies the issues and the purposes of the war. He is then able to decide how to work on the issues calmly, using a Buddhist-Taoist manner of expression to depict the subject matter. The second Buddhist approach is to find the truth of problems and to express these problems in a way that later generations can understand in regard to the impact of war. In Tam Giao fashion, the artist, a Vietnamese Confucian, identifies the subject matter of politics and war through his Confucian outlook and then voices it to the international community using Buddhist-Taoist metaphors.

After 2000, Vietnamese society was divided into two environments: rural and urban. The village culture still maintains its strong traditional characteristics (as mentioned in the Literature Review); however, in all cities, Vietnamese social customs have been modified to adapt to contemporary ideas based on Western democracy. According to Mark Sidel (2008, pp. 141–65), the economic and political gaps between rural and urban environments continue to grow. In the late 1990s, industrialisation developed significantly, ranging from foreign-financed factories to state-owned enterprises. Sidel (2008, pp. 141–217) also points out that the Vietnamese legal system developed at the same time, and after a decade and a half of supported legal reforms, regulations and processes looked more modern, more detailed and more user-friendly to the business community. He notes that since 1990 the majority of Vietnamese artists have engaged with the three art centres of Europe, America and Asia. Artists' attitudes changed; they began to refuse to work to promote a particular political purpose and instead began to focus on self-identity. During this period, the globalisation of East Asian arts affected the contemporary art movement in Vietnam.

After 2005, Vietnamese society became contradictory and paradoxical, moving between the issues of urban and rural cultural development. This contradiction needs to be considered when analysing contemporary Vietnamese cultural identity in the postwar period. In most cities, traditional cultural patterns have been changed due to rapid commercialisation, urbanisation and population growth, creating competition and uncertainty. New Taoist-Confucian beliefs manifest as democratic communism in urban areas, where a new business class who came from the country brought their Taoist beliefs with them and were forced to comply with the



new form of democratic enterprises. Taoism has once again been modified to suit the environment, with Taoist-Confucians who in turn influence business ideology. Both environments—urban and rural traditions—are absorbing a new elite cultural politics through the injection of diverse social elements.

Ordinary people have tried various strategies to cope with trauma in Vietnam's new environment. The city has seen the extension of small-scale trading and selling in the streets. Many people want to promote social influences learned from Western culture. They want to blend economic capital with existing Tam Giao social values (see the previous discussion around Dinh Thi Tham Poong in Chapter 5). The second section of this chapter examines how post-traumatic adaptation is represented by performance artists and addresses how they act as activists and use their role to express rural social and cultural concerns about the political mainstream. The artists use outdoor public performances and attempt to reshape conservative rural attitudes to assimilate urban social reforms in order to cope with the cultural traumas.

This chapter uses two terms *activist-art* and *art activist* in a discussion of the performance works. According to Grindon (2011), *activist-art* is a form of social movement, coming from the term *activist* and is an ideological derivative of the word 'action', referring to one who adopts the anarchist strategy of political action (pp. 10–11). However, activist-art should be understood in Vietnamese social movements as 'art in action'—artistic expression that reflects contemporary social and cultural formations. In contrast, the term *art activist* refers to an artist who uses an art form in acting as an activist in a social movement.

Smith (2011) examines artists from Asia, Central Europe and the West who began to experiment with art 'action' that paralleled the cultural movements and environments of their localities. Artists have developed this type of art since 1990. He emphasises how this type of art has had a substantial impact on political and social movements. He also provides an example from China where Chinese artists publicly 'performed' their deep concern about their government's actions in limiting human behaviour. Zhu Yu's performance, *Cannibalism*, was one of the most challenging for the Chinese state authorities (Smith, 2011, p. 160).

While public performance art attracts viewers, its artists work in an awkward situation. Osip Brik explains the difficulty of a performance artist's role in performing,

saying 'artists turn their back on him [the art activist]. Industrialists wave him away in annoyance' (as cited in Grindon, 2011, pp. 79–96). Levine & Levine (2011) further explain this problem in terms of 'low skill in academic art but showing high sensitivity' (p. 67). In this century, the function of art has been changed by performance artists to suit the community.

### **Artists as activists represent the Vietnamese cultural traumatic sequence**

Public performance art is a new form of the visual arts able to serve various audiences. In a discussion about the functions of art, Grindon (2011, pp. 79–96) identifies two different features; the first is the change of values in relation to traditional art, and the second is that art can reformulate the celebration of creative vitality. This new form of art is placed into a new context focused on the composition of 'work' that is able to act for positive change. He also explains that this new art form has been adapted to meet the rise of urban mass-culture and leisure, which provides new spaces, new audiences and new types of viewers. However, with this new form of art (Grindon, 2011), the role of artists is in crisis because the values of the new art form stand for something other than the production of art objects. Levine and Levine (2011, p. 47) explore how artists use performance (including installation art) within their traditional systems, and they note that artists mix different art disciplines to create a new type of art to match contemporary conditions. The discipline mix can sometimes include traditional art for its expressive vocabulary and its ability to attract an audience who is familiar with its forms. Bui and Pham (2012, pp. 42–4) identify the role of Vietnamese folk performance art in the new form of performance art as it, too, requires working outdoors. Other artists who can only appreciate the aesthetics of formal art for museum purposes are challenged by public performance art. They suggest that only bold and strong characters can use this form, and that artists often encounter issues of censorship.

Since 1994, Vietnamese performance art has influenced the community in multiple ways. Performance artists have used many different disciplines, such as performance, installation art, video arts and modified traditional visual art forms to represent their thinking as activists. Dao Anh Khanh is the case study in this section. His memory represents and reflects the broader community's traumatic memories. According to Eyerman (2004a, p. 74), collective memory is rooted in traumatic events, which are open to varying sorts of evaluation, and it may take a generation

to move from group memory to public memory. Group memory is rooted in history and refers to a collective identity, which may have its origins in direct experience. Group memory is expressed through narratives that are modified through the passage of time and through cultural artefacts or other materialisations that represent the past in the present. Dao Anh Khanh represents a collective identity in some aspects of the Vietnamese traumatic sequence, and his performance art presents how the community copes with these traumas. To understand how the artist works on his performance and his subject matter, one needs to use a framework to identify different types of traumatic symptoms in order to locate the artist's actions. Eyerman provides a framework that is useful for an analysis of collective memory as a cultural traumatic symptom. This framework serves to highlight two issues: first, a generation shaped by the direct experience of an event and, second, a generation shaped by memory. The latter will be used to analyse Dao Anh Khanh's work, which expresses Eyerman's ideas about how the 'past' war trauma becomes a 'present' matter—postwar cultural trauma.

### **Case study: artist Dao Anh Khanh**

Dao Anh Khanh attracts thousands of viewers who come from all over Vietnam to watch his performances in Gia Lam, Hanoi. He has also performed in many overseas venues. He has attempted a range of techniques and knows how to use traditional materials within the Vietnamese environment in his performances. He also uses painting, sculpture, folk music and artefacts, which facilitate his communication with the audience, who are curious and want to understand the unfolding events of the performance. The artist uses a simple, jargon-free art language, which enables him to communicate to the viewer at his events and raise the audience's level of curiosity. These types of events have been increasing in visibility and inclusion at different venues and have lately become the centre of an art-based therapy for audiences. Dao Anh Khanh is capable of creating multiple views for the audience and provoking the expression of people's feelings during his shows. His art form has the capacity to facilitate change in people's feelings and can be used in public places to present the broader community's concerns about political or social issues (Bui & Pham, 2012, pp. 43–4).

Dao Anh Khanh is a former security police officer and he worked in the Police Academy for 10 years. He resigned from this role in 1990. Since then, he has devoted his life to contemporary art. He works as an activist who shows a high level

of skill in the critical analysis of social and political subject matters. He also shows that he is capable of tackling complexity by the way in which he handles the audience's multi-viewpoints through selected subject matter. He creates an event using a series of performative actions to demonstrate his arguments. Thousands of people from a variety of backgrounds, such as farmers, engineers, police, artists and politicians, enjoy his events (Le 2014, pers. comm., 12 February) (see Appendix 33).

Dao Anh Khanh has used the theme 'revisiting spring' for his annual performance since 2003. Each long performance lasts more than three hours and uses fire, water, light, sounds and music to depict the significant issues remaining in the community. In *Revisiting spring, 2004*, he combined performance with installation art to address the social movements at that time: a demand for political clarity (simplicity against complexity) and freedom, not imprisonment (see Appendix 34). His strategy is to show the community how to reshape their personal situation and experiences amid contemporary globalising life. This performance took place in the evening, the atmosphere created by candlelight in the 400-square-metre space he owns in Gia Lam. According to two VnExpress News journalists, Thu Trang and Hai Anh, the set looked like a surrealist 'painting' with candlelight in a garden with only some small trees and grass:

Artist Dao Anh Khanh performed with five dancing couples. In the first phase of the performance, these five couples began dancing from the corner of the garden where there is only candle-light. They wore their outdated fashions and moved towards the centre. In the centre he organized electric light and modern equipment. In the second phase of this performance, he used a pure nylon screen which covered the centre space, and behind the nylon screen, there were the performers representing imprisonment, but quietly waiting for an opportunity to get out of this situation, [see Appendix 34]. The second phase of this performance began when the screen was turned off; Dao Anh Khanh appeared on a wooden white boat hanging over these performers. He began to sing with his special diverse vocal tones. Fire and smoke were used loudly 'tearing the darkness' of the black backdrop in this night [see Appendix 36]. He appeared as an intuitive man who belonged to the primitive world, and he danced and sang together with the performers. Both phases of the performance portrayed the significant aspects of current

Vietnamese social movement showing the conflict of life demands that is freedom and simplicity against complexity. (Thu & Hai, 2004)

In the first phase of the performance, Dao Anh Khanh extended to the viewer the opportunity to link their desire for simplicity in life to their outrageously busy conditions and to compare their past and current circumstances. In the second phase, he addressed the issue of fast-changing contemporary life, which brings to some a better chance to live (represented by the figure descending from the boat). However, some people feel imprisoned, with no opportunities in life; this was represented in the middle of the performance through the use of the symbol of people trapped in the pure nylon screen.

This performance represented the cultural traumas generated by major social change and represented Vietnam's traumatising conditions and situations. These actions are intuitively understood by his audience. The audience consists of many different social and cultural groupings, but each individual will understand his work through their own feelings and appreciation of his work. Dao Anh Khanh uses powerful lighting contrasts and hand gestures and body movements in the shadows to depict the complexity of life. The viewer, according to Thu & Hai (2004), feels the need for a tranquil life.

Discussing the performance, the former deputy of the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum in Hanoi, Nguyen Binh Minh, commented that Dao Anh Khanh successfully depicted the subject matter. She felt total freedom from her anxiety because, during the performance, she had the opportunity to compare the past and present context of her life and intuitively understood his solutions for tackling the subject matter. She explained that his actions in this performance represented subconscious motivations and that the changing music and sounds in the performance brought to her a direct and sudden awareness of the imbalance of the experience of contemporary life. She commented, 'I felt relief from the complexity of my own life' (Le 2014, pers. comm., 20 April). However, different audiences show different reactions after viewing the performance. Art researchers Bui and Pham (2012) commented that Dao Anh Khanh is 'like a lonely, primitive man who screamed and sought peace from today's chaotic social situation (p. 110). At the beginning of the performance, many policemen attended and attempted to stop the performance. Farmers who viewed this show shared their own particular perspective. 'They cried when they saw me

sing and move slowly toward them', revealed Dao Anh Khanh in interview (Le 2014, pers. comm., 7 January).

In another 2006 performance entitled *Lap tran*, which translates as 'Over filled' (see Appendix 36), Dao Anh Khanh addressed resentment about Vietnam's over-restrictive communist authority. He hired 70 dancers from the Vietnamese highlands to work with him for this large-scale event. In interview, Dao Anh Khanh described the sequence of events. In the first phase of his performance, the 70 dancers were required to imitate his actions from simple to very complex gestures. They followed his gestural guidance, but eventually the group of performers could no longer copy his movements and they became confused. Dao Anh Khanh then walked backwards and held a dancer at the rear of the line, and he then pulled the dancer backwards. The whole line of 70 performers then copied the action and, pulling each other, went backwards (Le 2014, pers. comm., 7 January).

With this performance, the artist addressed the harm inflicted upon social and cultural life by the struggle between community and authority. By using the term *Lap tran* he explains, through metaphor, the nature of failure, using the image of water spilling from a container. The consequences of authoritarian abuse and a monopoly of social control contribute to the development of cultural traumatic issues, according to Sztompka (2004, pp. 178–84). Dao Anh Khanh used very loud and discordant music when the performers, who were copying his gestures, lost the ability to mimic them as the gestures became more confused and unpredictable. The performers retreated as the volume of the music became unbearable, sounding like tearing fabric and creating a sense of lost direction and lost personalities (Le 2014, pers. comm., 7 January). According to Bui and Pham (2012, p. 110) Dao Anh Khanh has the ability to explore and realise important issues. Conjuring up wordless images, he awakens memories that have lain deep in the audience's mind. Dao Anh Khanh challenges himself and his audience by engaging in an ongoing social narrative.

Levine and Levine (2011) suggest that works of art not only depict our lives but also have the capacity to affect them. They identify this as 'our aesthetic response' when artworks touch 'people's literal reality and have an impact on the viewer' (p. 25). This is a psychological aspect of the aesthetic experience. They also observe that the artist needs to have the ability to transcend the self to be able to imagine the experience of others and their communal world (p. 25). In interview with Dao Anh

Khanh, he explained about his Buddhist-Taoist method to find strategies to work on his subject matter (Le 2014, pers. comm., 7 January). To gain effective means of expression, before the performance takes place the artist bolsters his energy using Buddhist-Taoist practices. He needs to be in a pure meditative state, his perception clear and unimpeded by personal problems (this is a Buddhist strategy). He then consciously listens to his deep feelings and begins to look for a musical fluency in his mind until a mythical resource of sound appears as if to guide him, and he then starts his performance (this is a Taoist strategy). During the performance, he follows his feelings and his natural vocal tones as if an ancestral music from the past guides him in the performance. His way of expression suits the tastes of ordinary Vietnamese people, and he attracts thousands of people to his performances. In interview, he revealed that during a highly concentrated performance, his inner Taoist sense begins to shape his expression; he becomes transformed and surrenders to the moment, and he does not force himself back into his preconstructed plan. A Confucian manner is evident in his performance style, as he approaches his aims through the refinement of his knowledge and his confidence to lead the show. The Confucian man accepts his responsibilities in making a remarkable act in order to express his concerns (Le 2014, pers. comm., 12 January). In interview, Dao Anh Khanh commented:

Artists belong to the community who understand the social and political atmosphere of the places where they live. They often record social issues in their blood and kept them in their mind. As an artist, I need to express what I understand of Vietnamese current issues, which are associated with global issues. [At this point he added that we are now unable to separate out local cultures.] I want to speak or express my concerns. I found that as contemporary Vietnamese art shares an international art language it means that it obtains a global form of expression. (Le 2014, pers. comm., 12 January)

He explained how he develops his ideas:

Ideas for a performance art should begin from 'self-feelings' about the issue of identity, then follows a need to find different aspects from a personal source. In order to develop the idea to become multi-aspected and representative of community concerns, the artist uses a series of images to represent his subject in the work of construction for the performance. I

always need to find universal triggers in terms of actions, which bring to the performance multiple ideas, giving the audience suggestions, which should be related to their collective memories. (Le 2014, pers. comm., 12 January)

Dao Anh Khanh acknowledges that he is an individual embedded in the community and that his performances should therefore be concerned about the environment where he lives. His art in action reflects social and cultural changes and suggests coping strategies for the complex and subtle situations of the traumatic condition represented. He presents his subject matter as an art activist seeking pathways that will lead towards the development of communication networks between his community and the nation. The role of an art activist like Dao Anh Khanh in Vietnam is that of social activism. He does not represent himself as an artist but rather as a political critic of the postcommunist outlook. he uses performance art as a new art tool to engage the new type of audience that wants to share the artist's concerns. Dao Anh Khanh represents a group of Vietnamese contemporary artists who use traditional Vietnamese art language to change their creative forms and ways of communicating to express their personality.

The two sections above have elaborated on the cultural context for the formation of new forms of art by illustrating the ways in which artists, as activists, can absorb globalising art elements to then produce work that reflects Vietnamese social and political movements. Both Truong Tan and Dao Anh Khanh narrate Vietnamese conditions and situations. Both artists combine different art disciplines, Tam Giao elements and aspects of global art practice to express community concerns. Both artists also represent the impact of collective memories from the past, which have caused the intense emotions that reflect postwar traumas.

### **International information contributes to the Vietnamese cultural traumatic sequence**

The final section of this chapter examines how the last category of the traumatic sequence occurred in Vietnam. Since 2005, Vietnamese social development and economic expansion has demanded a new relationship with Western capital. The West has also wanted to do business with Vietnam. Legislation was required to facilitate the nation's much-needed economic and industrial development. Consequently, new knowledge in developing working relationships with Western companies was required. The leadership style of Confucian communism contrasts



with democratic methods and needed adjustment alongside training to obtain new skills. A second phase of the legal development in 2006 was adaptation to the age of globalisation. Vietnam is undergoing a cultural and structural transformation through the impacts of internal and external relationships (Sidel, 2008, pp. 164–5).

Sztompka (2004) identifies the last category of the traumatic sequence as a period of overcoming trauma. It concerns a wide range of social and political events associated with other parallel contexts (pp. 168–9). This can be demonstrated in the way that, since 2005, companies, institutions and the education have absorbed aspects of Western cultural systems. It has created a dynamic network of movements of cultural change. An analysis of the fast changes in situations and conditions within Vietnamese society caused by *traumatogenic* social changes follows (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of the term *traumatogenic*). Traumatogenic change is identified in the visual arts through the characteristics of speedy, comprehensive, fundamental and unexpected creation of cultural change. These are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 and in Sztompka (2004, pp. 158–9).

‘The revolution in communication and information leading towards the global age’ identified by Alexander (2004, p. 155) affected the postwar society in Vietnam. It made a strong impact on Vietnam’s Confucian communist culture post-2005.

First, there is the expansion of personal and social capital, which is a part of the new form of personality based on traditional resources successfully tapped under the new conditions. In the following section, this set of factors is used to examine the conflicts of the heritage of cultural beliefs and the democratic and market cultures leading to the leadership styles and personal changes in overcoming cultural trauma. Dang Thuy Lieu and her business, artistic and institutional leadership will be examined as a means to understanding the rapid change in the Vietnamese economy and culture and how this reflects on the individual in terms of traumatogenic change. During this period, her personality intensified and formed a new identity representing complexity in the new cultural and societal formation.

First, the cultural split of Confucian communism and the impact of capitalism on Vietnam’s communist milieu affected most enterprises in urban places. The postwar need for survival and for economic development led the Vietnamese Government to create opportunities for new private enterprises to develop and grow after the Doi Moi period. This significant decision created profound changes in all aspects of the

local culture and economy. Western companies entered Vietnam after the Doi Moi policy announcement, and since 2005 they have established many short training courses for Vietnamese people who want to work with them. The government also focused on the development of business and the economy in the second phase of new legislation, which emphasised legal harmonisation and legal implementation to support industrialisation 'in a socialist transitional state' (Sidel, 2008, p. 222). A broad Vietnamese social movement saw the development of a natural relationship with Western business styles; however, this caused traditional culture to split into two opposing groups: feudalist communist and democratic communist (Sidel, 2008, pp. 141–65). Vietnamese society shows the influence of not only a democratic approach but also other Western values in the visual arts and literature. Vietnamese business leaders and entrepreneurs began to change their leadership style to suit the new economic circumstances, which resulted in conflicts between Confucian communism (with its characteristics of control and kinship) and the adoption of new leadership styles of management via the knowledge and techniques of the subject and business adaptability.

### **Case study: Duong Thuy Lieu and group organisers**

Duong Thuy Lieu's biography provides evidence of the meeting, and subsequent hybridising, of traditional Tam Giao society with Western economic ideology and its application. A former lecturer at the Hanoi University of Agriculture, she graduated in the Bachelor of Education in 1986. In 1992, she enrolled in a short marketing course organised by an American company. In this short course, she was trained in marketing techniques in accordance with Western commercial methodology. **First phase in her business life,** Duong Thuy Lieu became head of the Hanoi branch of the PetrolVietnam As a company head, she had to deal with the differences between Vietnamese and Western strategies of leadership. She was in the same situation as several Vietnamese leaders who wanted to be innovative in the commercial field but who found the conflict of leadership styles challenging (Le 2014, pers. comm., 25 May).

Second, since 2005, creative expression in the visual arts has changed from a controlled culture to one of freedom of creative expression and the freedom to learn and create art to achieve personal artistic goals. Duong Thuy Lieu is a contemporary artist, who studied art by travelling to the major international art centres, including Britain, North America, Spain and Singapore, among others. She

met with international collectors and analysed artworks in the company of international art critics, such as the American art critic Angela Molina. In interview, Duong Thuy Lieu said she learned about the visual arts by studying the 'mistakes' in the composition of masterworks of art. Duong Thuy Lieu is an open-minded person, who has an innovative leadership style and who is adept at learning new skills in practical fields. She has had the opportunity to meet different types of people, such as marketing experts international critics, and to see international art resources. She is currently living in a Vietnamese culture that enables her to create a new type of individual identity in the midst of social change. In 2006, she was the first woman artist who has not had a formal art education to hold a solo exhibition in the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology. This is significant in a society that for decades had its visual culture directed by the state. This first solo exhibition was to receive recognition by national and international critics and art collectors. Angela Molina commented that the artworks reflect 'the sources of creation and destruction'. She also commented that Duong Thuy Lieu's creative works were 'new acts of (re) generation' (as cited in Menifique Art Meseum & Cuc Gallery, 2013). Duong Thuy Lieu's solo exhibition is evidence that the Vietnamese Tam Giao nation now acknowledges a new way of pursuing art. This also brings to the visual arts world in Vietnam a new outlook that signals a significant change in its ideology.

Third, in 2013, Duong Thuy Lieu established the Menifique Art Museum and is now the director of this institution. The museum's mission is to exhibit innovative art in Vietnam. She and her contemporaries, including Ly Tran Quynh Giang, Dinh Y Nhi and Nguyen Trung, refuse to use traditional ways of processing and expressing their subjects in their art. They wish to be involved in the Western art market, finding opportunities to be part of international festivals and art auctions. This creates more complexity within the cultural split in Vietnam and shows the diversity in national cultural values. The third trend in the visual arts and its artists (see Contextual Background) depicts the complexity of Vietnamese cultural transformation and indicates that the changes in the scope and depth of art challenges the mainstream art institutions. It also shows that the overlap between traditional, colonial French and the new cultural components is creating a new cultural movement. Vietnamese contemporary society is reflected in the visual arts, demonstrating the fact that Vietnamese culture is reshaping its capacity to grasp both heritage and global elements. Since 2005, the force of capitalism, the spread of information and the increase in media (including travelling opportunities) has had a substantial impact

on Vietnamese culture. The critics Bui and Pham (2012, p. 11) believe that the feature of contemporary art in Vietnam are still unfolding.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the traumatic sequence in Vietnam between 2005 and 2014, analyzing how and why Vietnamese people possess the capacity to live with tremendous pain and loss as well as the potential to move beyond the situation. The narration of the features of the traumatic sequence was examined through three case studies: Truong Tan, Dao Anh Khanh and Duong Thuy Lieu.

In the Truong Tan case study, the research examined an aspect of the communal internal traumatic symptom and how traumatising situations are expressed through the Tam Giao outlook. His childhood trauma was re-narrated, understood and visualised in images later in his life. According to Giesen (2004), this symptom is called 'trauma of perpetrators' (p. 114).

This chapter has also examined how Vietnamese people adapt to the complexity of their traumatic conditions. Dao Anh Khanh was the case study for discussing how art activists in Vietnam narrate the collective facts associated with the last traumatic sequence described by Sztompka (2004, pp. 189–93). Through his annual *Revisiting spring* theme, Dao Anh Khanh courageously exposes key symbolic values that often remain hidden amid prescriptive solutions and which reflect postwar cultural trauma in Vietnam. His appeal to his audience instigated their ability to change their personal situation to overcome Vietnamese cultural trauma. His performance works reveal a legacy of turmoil in the process of cultural and social identity formation.

The research explored how the symptom of the cultural split between feudalism and communism and capitalist communism has affected the visual arts. The last section of this chapter has also examined the expansion of individual identity and coping strategies. These were adopted in response to the unsuitable situations in the transition of Vietnamese culture, using Dang Thuy Lieu as a case study. Vietnamese social formation is still undergoing cultural change. The third trend in visual arts, born in 2005, explains how the visual arts field continues to find new and different forms in a period of rapid social change, which is also a period of overcoming cultural trauma.

The Vietnamese community has had to cope with global change since the war ended in 1975. The impact of international information on Vietnam has forced Vietnamese culture to develop a new ideology suited to its particular phenomenological circumstances in order to implement radical economic development in enterprises and for them to survive after the long war that affected the nation so severely. The Vietnamese demonstrate their strength and resilience in adapting to their environment; however, the global art coming from Western world by digital technology have had a profound effect on Vietnamese Tam Giao culture.

Today, Vietnamese culture is still internally finding new forms in the process of overcoming trauma. The healing of traumatic symptoms is still continuing. This period of overcoming trauma, of moving to a new phase, depends on the scope of individual resources, such as education, connections and finance. We are looking towards further future research, depending on changes in the social movements that provide significant factors, in order to make a continuing analysis of the coming new Vietnamese cultural system.

## Outcomes of this Research

After studying the role of Tam Giao cultural influences on artists, focusing on Vietnamese postwar trauma between 1985 and 2014, I address here some significant aspects of this study: first, the use of Tam Giao metaphors for political expression in the visual arts; second, audiences and their cultural differences are issues in communication; and third, the use of Buddhist ideas to express postwar traumas challenges the audiences from different cultures who want to understand the meanings of artworks in the Tam Giao culture. Finally, I provide suggestions for further study developing from this research.

### *1. The use of Tam Giao metaphors for political expression in visual arts*

Miller (1979, p. 155) states that political inquiry has offered a place for the growth of metaphors. He also confirms that we are unable to avoid this type of expression in the artist discourse surrounding political knowledge. In this section of the study, I aimed to identify how the use of metaphors in the visual arts manifests political knowledge and thus offers to the audience a diversity of political opinion. It is important, however, to identify an audience who is familiar with political themes and appreciates this type of debate in the visual arts

Metaphorical expression in the political fields of different cultures uses devices that reflect the social and cultural customs and beliefs of people. Metaphors echo ways of knowing differently in different traditions. For example, people in political life speak of the 'players' on the president's 'team', of 'cutting fat' from a budget, or of the 'melting pot' of society (Miller, 1979, p. 155). Artists make visual use of these revealing everyday metaphors, which are deployed in their art. The question is, How can the meanings of artworks be communicated to a wider audience if some members of that audience have only one cultural context? It is evident that a basic level of learning about metaphorical work in language, based on a theory such as likeness or analogical metaphorical models could help the viewer. However, some metaphorical ideas come from the deeply embedded human relationships of everyday life, and artists then use the characteristics of everyday things to make them expressive creative tools that bring identical cultural meanings to their audience. What this research has revealed is that we interpret the meanings of the

political work of art if we share cultural, geographical and historical reference points, but sometimes for those outside these contexts the meanings are hidden.

I found that the national Vietnamese audience understands the themes portraying the postwar context of Vietnam in works of art, even though these metaphors may not be well understood by those outside the culture. The wider audience, including international artists, collectors, art historians and researchers from different cultures, who are familiar with South-East Asian culture may interpret the meanings of the artwork using Aristotle's model, automatically showing their potential to analyse the work of art without difficulty, but the average consumer of global art (Smith 2011) might find the meaning difficult to decipher. The figurative meaning of artwork in Vietnam sometimes uses very 'thick' descriptions from literature (see Chapter 1), which conceal political ideas when the audience first looks for meaning. However, an audience may still deeply understand the emotions and critical processes of the artists through observation of the actual social movements at that time.

## *2. Audiences and their cultural differences are issues in communication*

Each culture has its unique ways of expressing opinions. Before the twentieth century, most nations established national galleries in which the visual arts were esteemed for the way in which they expressed typical 'national' cultural identity and its development (Smith, 2011). The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been ones of technology and international communication, and a globalised foundation for art has been created (Harris, 2011). In the visual arts, artists have many opportunities to visit other forms of expression through digital media, which in turn has changed their art practices. The cultural elements for expression which once were national have changed and are now international. Even though artists experience this complexity, they try to reshape their perceptions and create artworks to show the whole world 'on small, local scales' Smith (2011, pp. 12–13). This means that meaning moves towards international appreciation with less specific, national, cultural identity, for example, artworks by Hirsch (see Appendix 17) or another artwork, by Minjun (see Appendix 21). However, it can be assumed that the unique expression of each culture is still present in the form and purpose of individual expression and that the use of idioms or figurative language and their aesthetics for expressing opinions are specifically used in artworks depicting political and social issues.

Having lived outside Vietnam for 24 years, enjoying the hybridity in Australian culture, I understand the barriers that limit understandings of Vietnamese art on the part of people from other cultural groups. These factors reflect on how artworks communicate. In this research, this cross-cultural understanding of artwork was addressed and solutions provided, especially with regard to the Tam Giao cultural expression in art (see Chapters 2 and 3). In these chapters, there are a number of investigations and explanations of several approaches, which show the tools to use for identifying and appreciating artworks. In the explanation of theories and their systems, there is some guidance to the concepts of Tam Giao, encouraging a greater understanding of the depth of meaning of paintings that use this approach.

### *3. Using Buddhist ideas to express postwar traumas challenges audiences from different cultures who want to understand the meanings of artworks in the Tam Giao culture*

Vietnamese culture has over 4,000 years of history. Artists have used Tam Giao ways of expression and have practised them throughout the centuries. Artworks produced since 1985 show a connection both to the ancient Tam Giao and to the contemporary world of international art. Discussing expression in relation to the 'taste' of the audience who want to appreciate artwork, we recognise that we have diversities of taste. By inviting an audience to sample a Tam Giao art of expression, this research offers a challenge to those who are used to a Western aesthetic. This is especially the case in the way that the Buddhist experience frames the expression of postwar traumas in Vietnam, which may, at first encounter, appear to be free of distress. In this situation, the audience should allow themselves to be uncoupled from their own cultural perspectives and understand how the war art experience from East Asia, specifically from Vietnam, is traditionally expressed without blood, disabled human figures or dead bodies. A good example of this is Truong Tan's *Illusion* (2011), which is about death but which approaches its depiction in metaphorical terms. Tam Giao figurative language, when used for political expression in artwork, shows artists embedded in Buddhist theories (including myths from Taoism), which 'hides' ideas on initial viewing. The structure of an artwork often builds from the artist's Buddhist experience. The audience from other cultures may look for images of death and violence or of anxiety in the expression of war themes; however, these are never found in the Tam Giao expression of war.



During the interviews with several artists who use Vietnamese literature resources to develop their art, I found that this could limit a wider audience's understanding of their artwork, but these works of the postwar trauma of Vietnam are explained in depth. These artworks also show a global and national absorption of the use of contemporary art of expression. As a result, international collectors have most of these artworks.

Vietnamese artists continue to find their own ways of expression to ensure they have a wider audience, because they recognise the importance of promoting themselves in international art markets (Le 2013, 2014, pers. comm., December and January).

#### *4. Suggestions for further study developing from this research.*

There are a number of significant aspects that offer opportunity for further investigation, which have emerged from this research:

- Can Tam Giao art using Buddhist experience to portray the postwar trauma in Vietnam be considered war art?
- Are the impacts of postwar traumas found in Vietnamese artworks reflected similarly in other countries which have had wars?
- To what extent do Tam Giao artistic metaphors challenge the Western audience's understanding of Vietnamese political issues?

Artists of the twenty-first century interact and work together to make global art Smith's (2011, p. 12) survey confirms that promoting technology and growth provides artists with the opportunity to work together. However, artists' own personal expression and traditional cultures also shape their ways of conception and presentation. They still show their own sense of humour and own way of expressing their anxiety. These factors were revealed in the new Tam Giao art of expression after 1985.

I trust my research contributes to a better understanding of Tam Giao concepts and that the examination of their use in paintings in the context of postwar trauma

reveals the continuing validity of the concepts and an understanding of how they are used.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix 1:

#### Systematic narrative observation of Tam Giao elements in history

History of Tam Giao development in Vietnam		Government structures	Vietnamese philosophy of each government	Vietnamese beliefs	Vietnamese customs
<div>Lacviet (pre-111 BC)</div> <div>Original philosophy</div> <div>Primitive philosophy: village elders governed and made rules</div> <div>Sources: Nguyen &amp; Le (2012); Vu (2001); Historians</div>		<div>Primitive structure of Lacviet people (Vietnamese)</div>		<div>Dieties and gods: images and statues found in many communal halls</div> <div>Chinese Taoism influences</div>	<div>Basic roles in village and its members: communal hall for the community meetings, communication and education</div> <div>Villages</div> <div>Divided careers</div>
<div>Pre-Dai Viet (111 BC–934)</div> <div>Import three philosophies</div> <div>Sources: Fisher (2002); Irons (2008); Nguyen &amp; Le (2012);</div>	<div>Buddhism</div> <div>Taoism</div> <div>Confucianism</div>	<div>Confucian structures</div> <div>Nguyen &amp; Le (2012, pp. 261–2)</div> <div>Established social classes</div> <div>Human behaviour and moral standards</div>	<div>Trieu–dinh (Government house)</div> <div>structure using Buddhism theory to create rules and basic laws</div>	<div>Religions:</div> <div>Buddhism</div> <div>Indian influences (see Outcomes of this Research)</div> <div>Vietnamese Taoism</div> <div>Confucianism</div>	<div>To identify leaders, the roles of husbands and wives, and family relationships</div> <div>Roles:</div> <div>Landlord owners</div> <div>Roles of husbands and wives</div>
<div>Dai Viet (934–1883)</div>	<div>Tam Giao</div>	<div>Ly dynasty (11th–12th</div>	<div>Trieu-dinh’s structure:</div>	<div>The four elements</div>	<div>Personal identity through</div>

<p>To blend three philosophies: Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism to become Tam Giao</p> <p>Sources: Fisher (2002); Hoang (1995); Marr &amp; White (1988); Nguyen &amp; Le (2012)</p>		<p>centuries)</p> <p>Tran dynasty (13th–14th centuries)</p> <p>Le dynasty Le-Mac Le-Trinh (15th–18th centuries)</p>	<p>Buddhist theory practised in the government, a Confucian model attempted</p> <p>Trieu-dinh structure: Buddhist &amp; Taoist religions influence the government</p> <p>Government characteristic: Taoism and Buddhism became folklore, and Confucianism emphasised in the structural government</p>	<p>below in Buddhism to practice: '<i>Sinh Ky Tu Quy</i>' from Buddhism</p> <p>These mean that to live is like being a lodger in the world, and to die is like returning home. (Hoang 1995, p. 5).</p>	<p>five virtues (characteristics)</p> <p><i>Van</i>: knowledge of life and universe</p> <p><i>Vu</i>: knowledge of army and war</p> <p><i>Dzung</i>: bravery</p> <p><i>Nhan</i>: humanity and sincerity</p> <p><i>Tin</i>: trustworthiness and loyalty</p>
<p><b>Post-Dai Viet: Vietnam (1883- 1945)</b></p> <p>Neo-Tam Giao</p> <p>Sources: Calhoun &amp; Tedeschi (2004); Kastfelt (2005); Le Quy Don</p>	<p>Tam Giao combination Emphasis on Confucianism</p>	<p>Nguyen dynasty</p> <p>Communist government</p>	<p>Trieu-dinh emphasis on Confucianism (selected elements only to support the royal family)</p> <p>Ho Chi Minh used Confucianism to structure his government</p> <p>A later government</p>	<p>Confucianism</p> <p>Communism</p>	<p>Individual Identity</p> <p>Communist identity</p>

(cited in Woodside, 1989); Woodside (1989)			adopted Western philosophy and combined it with the traditional Confucian structures		
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## **Appendix 2:**

### **Participants/interviewees list for the first visit in 2012–2013**

Name	Interview date	Name	Interview date
Trinh Cung	21 December 2012	Pham Trung	4 January 2013
Nguyen Quan	23 December 2012	Bui Nhu Huong	7 January 2013
Dang Xuan Hoa	27 December 2012	Lai Nguyen An	8 January 2013
Nguyen Minh Thanh	27 December 2012	Dang Nhat Minh	9 January 2013
Phan Cam Thuong	28 December 2012	Dang Xuan Hoa	11 January 2013
Trang Thanh Hien	2 January 2013	Dang Thi Khue	11 January 2013
Luong Xuan Doan	3 January 2013	Thanh Chuong	12 January 2013
Dang Thi Khue	3 January 2013	Ho Huu Thu	13 January 2013
Tran Hau Yen The	4 January 2013	Dao minh Tri	14 January 2013
Tran Luong	4 January 2013	Do Hoang Tuong	16 January 2013
		Nguyen Trung	17 January 2013

### **Appendix 3:**

#### **Questionnaire for interviewing 20 art participants as part of fieldwork in 2012**

##### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWING VIETNAMESE ARTISTS

1. What subject matters are you interested in? Before 1985 and after 1985?
2. What impact of the embargo policy (1975–85) have you experienced, which has affected your creative career, your family or your education?
3. How did the events that took place between 1975 and 1985 affect and influence your creative career, your family or your education?
4. What types of art or formal approaches did you use to respond to those events and experiences? (On canvas? Installation? Three-dimensional?)
5. How have cultural changes in Vietnam after 1985 been reflected in your artwork?
6. Why was the Gang of Five formed?
7. How did five different artists manage to work together?
8. How did audiences respond to the Gang of Five artworks?
9. What is your assessment of the Gang of Five?
10. How do you develop your ideas?
11. What has influenced your artwork?
12. What techniques, styles and processes do you use to represent your subject matter?

##### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWING ART AND LITERATURE CRITICS AND FILM DIRECTORS

1. What Vietnamese contemporary artists have been influenced by the Tam Giao philosophy in the postwar trauma context?
2. How does the Vietnamese Tam Giao philosophy influence the way that artist's think about their subject matter in postwar contexts?
3. What impact does Western art have on Vietnamese contemporary art after 1985?
4. How do artists in Vietnam keep Tam Giao as the basis of their art? (In your answer please focus on the following aspects):

- i. subject matter (reasoning, questioning: Buddhist, Taoist or Confucian ideas)
  - ii. techniques/materials (local or foreign)
  - iii. principles in artwork (national or international points of view).
5. Please give examples of how Tam Giao elements that represent a trauma are reflected in your chosen artist's work?
6. What global issues in the visual arts influence Vietnamese art and artists? Would you like to discuss this?



#### **Appendix 4:**

#### **Redefining assertions from patterns in data from the research instruments used in the first visits and from interviewing art participants**

Evidence and results from interviews with 20 art participants

##### **The following are similarities in opinions expressed by the critics:**

- Tam Giao philosophy has been used in customs and traditions in Vietnam.
- Tam Giao philosophy was interpreted from China and India in about the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Ethnic groups in Vietnam absorbed Tam Giao mainly through customs.
- Art has been created for what people wish for from life in general. For the soldiers and others who lacked a normal life in wartime during and after 1975, their subject matters have avoided expression of trauma.

##### **The following are similarities in opinions expressed by the artists:**

- The six artists did not choose subject matters when they began to create artworks. They followed their feelings to create artworks.
- Ideas will be clearer after the first attempt of brushes on a surface, and ideas or a subject matter will be confirmed throughout the art process. Sometimes an idea led the artists to work over the long term to complete it through a series of artworks.
- The subject matters encapsulated the after-war traumas (1985–95), which are in association with everyday life issues or everyday life subject matters.

## **Appendix 5:**

### **Questionnaire for interviewing artist Vu Dinh Tuan**

Interviewing questions

Artist Vu Dinh Tuan

1. How do you show your appreciation of Vietnamese folk art in your creative process? What do you value from the Vietnamese folk literature resources for your creative expression?
2. Explain why do you choose the folk art printing entitled *The four beauties* for developing your ideas? How do you use this resource to make it into a new way of expressing the female characteristics in both *Lady* series artworks?
3. You have produced two series each of four panels entitled *Lady*. In series one of *Lady* (Panels *I, II, III, IV*) all of their shoes are in front of the female figures when they are in formal performance. You portray these females having featureless blank faces and bare feet and their masks appear in different positions on their clothing. Can you explain these interesting details?
4. Series two of *Lady* (Panels *V, VI, VII, VIII*) uses a visual metaphor, which seems to have more than one meaning. Are you addressing a social comment, a political issue or your personal experiences by using the four animal heads on the female figures?
5. Who is in the background of each panel? What is the relationship between the female figure and the shadow figure in the background in each panel? Many circled shapes are on the female figures. What are you representing? Do these shapes represent symbols of gold coins?

## **Appendix 6:**

### **Participants/interviewees list for the second visit in 2013–2014**

Names	Interview dates
Do Hoang Tuong (Video-Skype interview)	17 September 2013
Dinh Thi Tham Poong	6 January 2014
Dao Anh Khanh	7 & 15 January 2014
Ly Tran Quynh Giang	8 January 2014
Bui Nhu Huong	9 January 2014
Pham Trung	10 January 2014
Vu Dinh Tuan	14 January 2014

**Appendix 7:****Participants/interviewees list for the third visit in 2014**

Names	Interview dates
Le Van Suu	21 April 2014
Hoang Anh Suong	23 April 2014
Duong Thuy Lieu	24 April 2014
Pham Phuong Cuc	24 April 2014

## **Appendix 8:**

### **Doi Moi Policy in 1986**

From 1980 to 1985, the Vietnamese economy experienced a serious crisis: production was stagnant. The Sixth Party Congress in 1986 announced the Doi Moi policy, which marked a historical turning point by redirecting economic and cultural development. The new government policy allowed economic enterprises to develop on their own initiative, and they were allowed to have association with their counterparts in the international world. Therefore, Vietnamese artists were allowed to exhibit their artwork outside the country, and they participated in many international art exhibitions such as ASIA (Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art), USA galleries, and in Sydney and Melbourne (Vu, 2001, p. 23).

**Appendix 9:**

**Aivazovsky's 1850 painting *The ninth wave*, oil on canvas, Russian Museum, St Petersburg**



Artist: Aivazovsky

Title: *The ninth wave*

Year: 1850

Material: oil on canvas

Size: 221 cm x 332 cm

Location: State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Source: Ware, 1989, pp. 42–3

**Appendix 10:**

**Hokusai's 1829–32 print *The great wave of Kanagawa*, woodcut Japan**



Artist: Hokusai

Title: *The great wave of Kanagawa*

Year: 1829–32

Material: colour ink woodcut

Size: 25.7 cm x 37.8 cm

Location: Japan

Source: Seiji, 1999

## Appendix 11:

### Debra Porch's 1997 installation art *Secret = stories*, mixed media



Artist Debra Porch

Title: *Secrets = stories*

Year: 1997

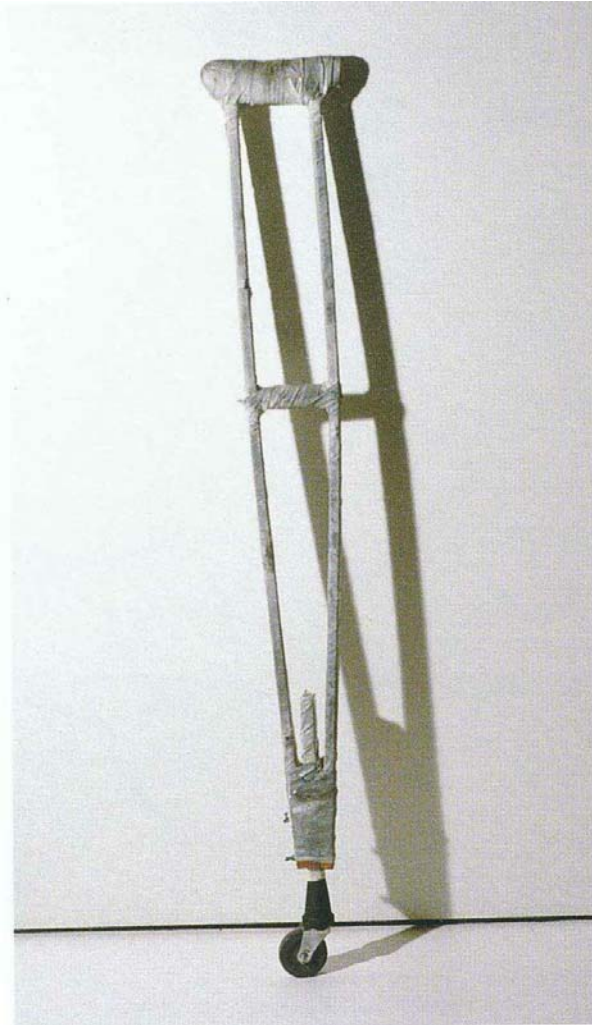
Source: The Asialink Centre, Object Magazine, The performance Space, Australian Embassy Hanoi, 1997, p. 48

Artist's statement:

'Visual work which has been generated from issues related to mortality, with a metaphorical relationship between women, hair and objects in Vietnamese society became a source of connecting ideas from two different cultures. Our conversation began with 'art' but seemed to end with (yet) another insight into each other' (as cited in The Asialink Centre, Object Magazine, The performance Space, Australian Embassy Hanoi, 1997, p. 48).



**Donal Fitzpatrick's 1997 installation *Good intentions*, mixed media**



Artist Donal Fitzpatrick

Title: *Good intentions*

Year: 1997

Source: Asialink Centre, Object Magazine, The performance Space, Australian Embassy Hanoi, 1997, p. 30

Artist's statement:

'My work, framed around speculations of identity, remains entrenched in my own thinking and is probably of little use or appeal to others. Where I personally feel empathy between my own art and that of the Vietnamese artists is a conviction that painting is fundamentally about ethics. A discipline of meaning about what you do, not doing what you don't mean' (as cited in The Asialink Centre, Object Magazine, The performance Space, Australian Embassy Hanoi, 1997, p. 30).

**Appendix 12:**

**Picasso's 1943 sculpture *Bull's head*, mixed media**



Artist: Picasso

Title: *Bull's head*

Material: Mixed media

Year: 1942

Source: Green, 1985, p. 62

### **Appendix 13:**

#### **A system of psychological support in Buddhism**

Religions have been used in Asia not only for teaching people customs and beliefs but also as a powerful source of psychological support, giving people advice and sometimes comfort when they wish to avoid suffering. Vietnamese culture does not have psychologists like Western cultures do; therefore, when trauma or stress occurs, people go to pagodas, temples or community halls to consult with Buddha or Buddhist fairies, who are the Buddha's messengers according to Vietnamese beliefs and customs. People confess in a pure, quiet area; they nurture themselves and look for their own will to adapt to the environment. (Irons, 2008)

#### Appendix 14:

#### Buu Chi earlier work—before 1975, ink drawing on paper



Artist: Buu Chi

Title: *Fighting for activists in jail*

Material: ink on paper

Year: 1970

Source: Buu and Pham, 2012, p. 324



Artist: Buu Chi

Title: *We have to be able to see the sun*

Material: ink on paper

Year: 1972

Source: Buu and Pham, 2012, p. 324

## **Appendix 15:**

### **Buu Chi's biography**

Buu Chi (1948–2002) was a fifth generation descendent of the Nguyen Emperor Minh Mang (1820–1840). He was a Vietnamese lawyer and an artist who consistently used war themes in his art before 1975 and to portray war traumas in his art after 1975. He was strongly affected by the destruction and suffering caused by the Vietnam War. He became an activist and student leader in the peace movement in Hue (a city in central Vietnam). He joined the movement while studying law at the University of Hue, where he graduated in 1971. A year later he was arrested by the South Vietnam government for his involvement in anti-war activities; he was released in 1975 when the whole country was united. (Fan, 2008, p. 82)

**Appendix 16:**

**Basquiat's 1981 mixed-media painting *Untitled* on canvas**



Artist: Jean-Michel Basquiat

Title: Untitled

Material: Acrylic and mixed media on canvas

Year: 1981

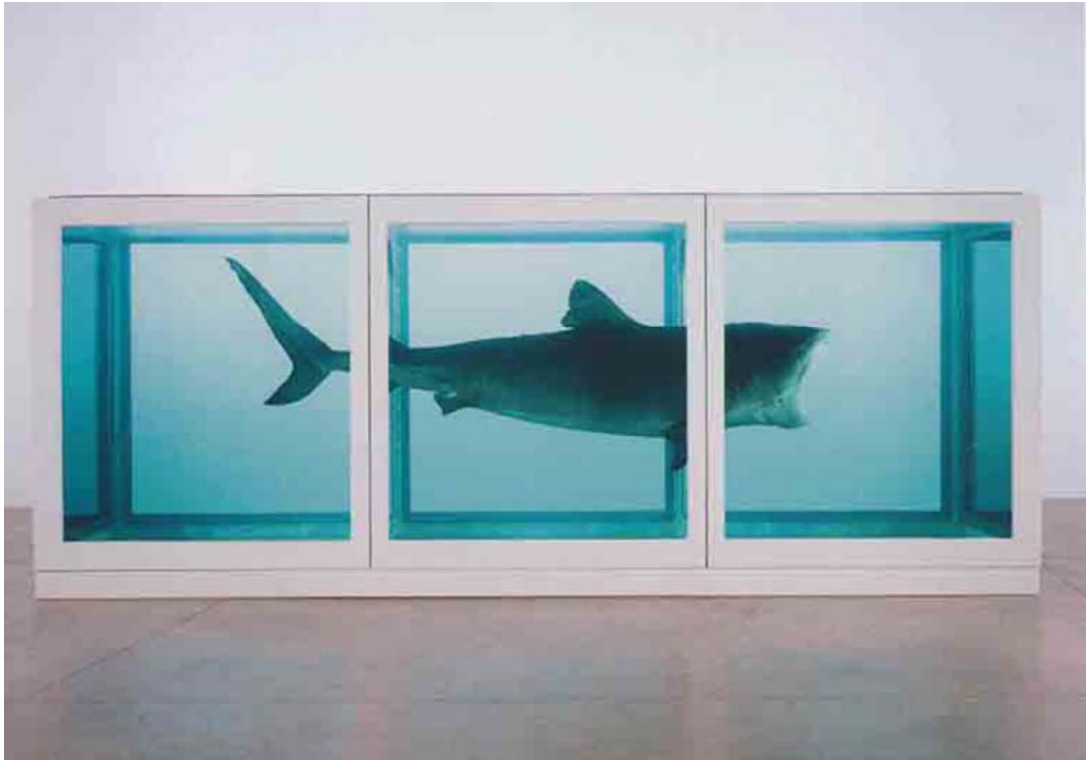
The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection, Los Angeles

Source: Smith, 2011, p. 67



**Appendix 17:**

**Hirsch's 1991 installation art *The physical impossibility of death in the mind of someone living*, Tiger shark formaldehyde, glass and steel**



Artist: Damien Hirsch

Title: *The physical impossibility of death in the mind of someone living*

Material: Tiger shark formaldehyde, glass and steel

Year: 1991

Steven A. Cohen collection, Greenwich Connecticut

Source: Smith, 2011, p. 67

**Appendix 18:**

**Emin's 1998 installation art *My bed*, objects**



Artist: Tracey Emin

Title: My bed

Material: Mattress, linens, pillows, objects

Year: 1998

Saatchi Collection, London

Source: Smith, 2011, p. 67



**Appendix 19:**

**Guangyi's 1993 painting *Great criticism: Coca-Cola***



Artist: Wang Guangyi

Title: Great criticism-Coca-Cola

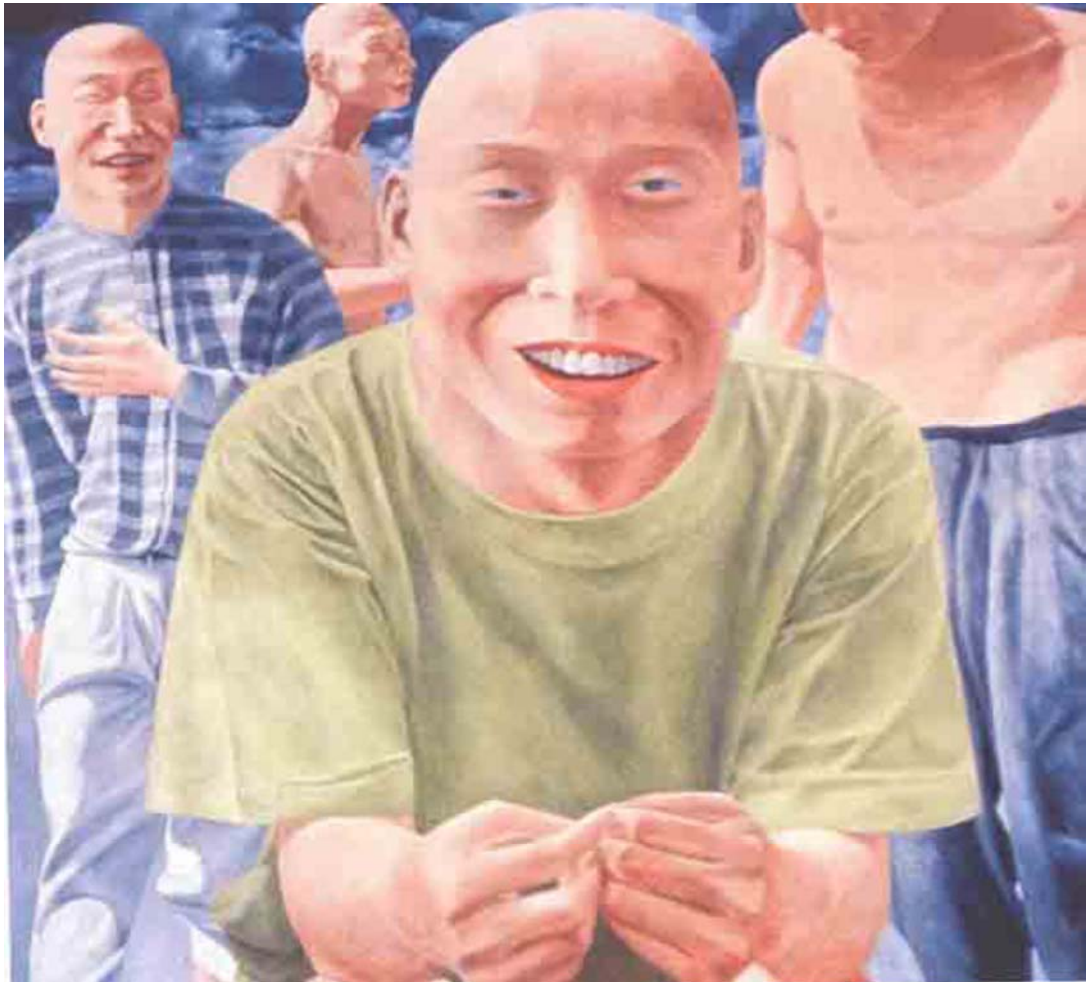
Material: oil on canvas

Year: 1993

Source: Smith, 2011, p. 159

**Appendix 20:**

**Lijun's 1991–92 painting *Series two no.1* (Smith, 2011, p. 158)**



Artist: Fang Lijun

Title: *Series two no 1*

Material: Oil on canvas

Year: 1991–92

Source: Smith, 2011, p. 158

**Appendix 21:**

**Minjun's 1995 painting *Execution*, oil on canvas**



Artist: Yue Minjun

Title: *Execution*

Material: Oil on canvas

Year: 1995

Source: Smith, 2011, p. 159

**Appendix 22:**

**Buu Chi's painting Blind man playing the monochord, oil on paper**



Artist: Buu Chi

Title: *Blind man playing the monochord*

Material: oil on paper

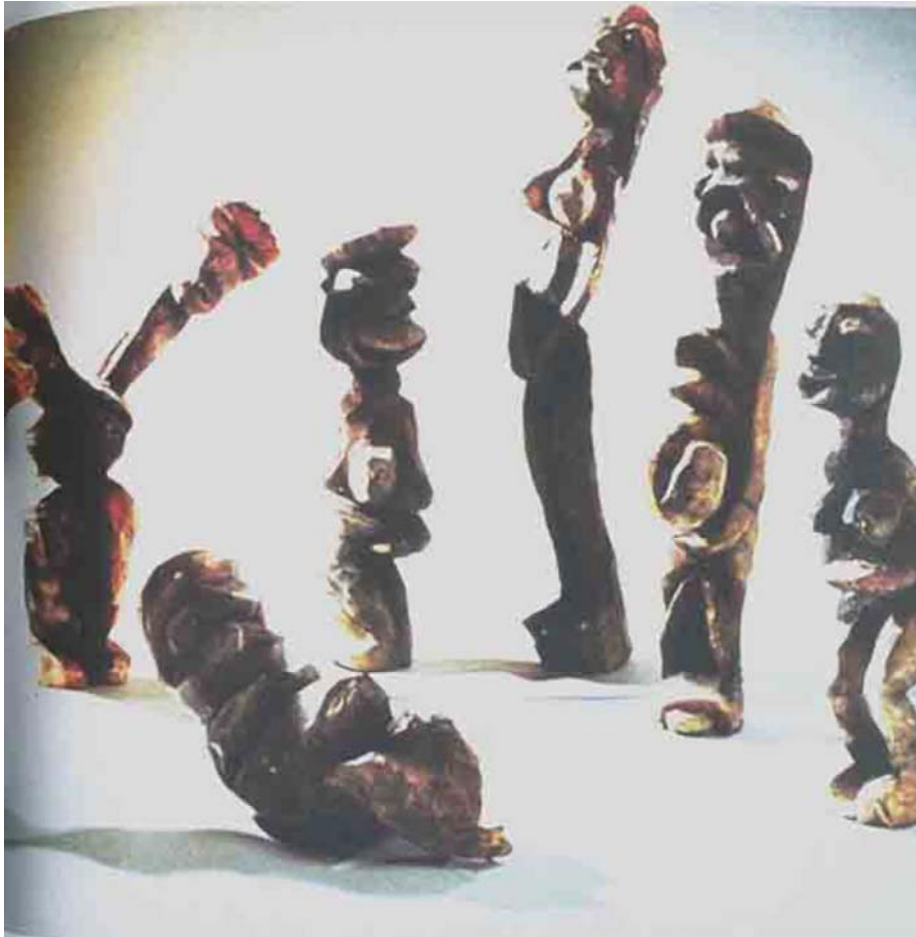
Year: 1994

Source: Fan, 2008, p. 47



**Appendix 23:**

**Nguyen Nhu Y's 1999 Sculpture installation, wood**



Artist: Nguyen Nhu Y

Title: *Sculpture installation*

Material: Wood

Year: 1999

Source: Fan, 2008, pp. 90–1

**Appendix 24:**

**Nguyen Xuan Tiep's 1993 painting *The return*, oil on canvas**



Artist: Nguyen Xuan Tiep

Title: *The return*

Material: Oil on canvas

Year: 1993

Source: Fan, 2008, p. 122

**Appendix 25:**

**Dang Xuan Hoa's 1994 painting *Human's object no. 1***



Artist: Dang Xuan Hoa

Title: *Human object no 1*

Material: Oil on canvas

Year: 1994

Source: Fan, 2008, pp. 140–1



## Appendix 26:

Findlay, 2008, 'Between tradition and modernity', *Asian Art News*, Vol. 18, No. 5, p. 108

vase. The second thing is that beyond function I wanted to show the people that had made these things or objects and I should respect them," says Hoa. "Although there are no people in the paintings, through the narrative of the things in my still life there is a sense of someone there. So my still life is also about time. I wanted to say that through the objects represented in the paintings there is also something about time passing and the limitlessness of time. I love the cats in my early work. I painted the cat because this cat was either nice or angry when it was chasing mice. I loved my cat. It was also a complex character. And it was a metaphor for Vietnamese life. This was also my romantic time."

Although still life is central to Hoa's oeuvre, among his finest work is his figuration, something with which he has

experimented since the mid-1980s. Early figurative works, including his portraits and self-portraits, were darkly expressionistic. Today, although they remain expressionistic, they have about them openness bounded by a strong line and colors that are a little more subdued in hue. But portraits, single and individual works, such as *Red of Face*, *Face and Hands of Hoa*, *Artist and His Daughter*, *The Window*, and *Sweet Dreams* (all 2008), one can see how important this form is for Hoa.

"When I did my self-portraits, I wanted to look and examine myself. I was stuck within myself as an artist. I found it was much easier to express myself through self-portraits," says Hoa. "I tried to look

at my innermost emotions. [Through self-portraits] I could begin to understand deeper emotions. The process doesn't come easily. I saw some nice things about myself but there were many times when I saw things that I didn't like. For example I saw great dissatisfaction with myself as life around me. When I was painting self-portraits, I looked more at my emotions rather than what I look like physically."

But the change from still life to a figurative narrative, from the early 1990s onwards, was brought about by a desire to express a new relationship between himself and his art, as well as trying to see more about the condition of Vietnamese society today.

"I felt that human beings are the main subject of art in general, in the theater, painting, cinema, music, opera, and



Dang Xuan Hoa, *Time and Sources of Light*, 2008, mixed media, 67 x 154 cm.



Dang Xuan Hoa, *Men*, 2008, oil on canvas, 69 x 154 cm.



## Appendix 27:

### Findlay's 2008 '30 top SEA artists'

30 TOP SEA ARTISTS 2008		
	US\$ 89,771 (Final Price) <b>11</b> Christie's 2008 Geraldino Javier <i>Curating The Sky</i>	
	US\$ 82,367 (Final Price) <b>12</b> Sotheby's 2008 Dang Xuan Hoa <i>Life</i>	
	US\$ 74,963 (Final Price) <b>13</b> Sotheby's 2008 Putu Sutawijaya <i>Jalan Kebahagiaan</i>	
	US\$ 72,002 (Final Price) <b>14</b> Sotheby's 2008 Ronald Ventura <i>Black and Blanche</i>	
	US\$ 60,156 (Final Price) <b>15</b> Christie's 2008 Dadang Christanto <i>Head between Hills</i>	

Dang Xuan Hoa's 2008 painting *Family fetches*, plate no. 12, *AsianArt News* (n.d)  
Source: Le, 2013, pers. comm., 11, January.

**Appendix 28:**

**Duong Manh Hung's 2006 photograph Post-psychic subject, the new subject of the Human Potential Study**



Photographer: Duong Manh Hung

Year: 2006

Title: *Post-psychic subject, a new subject of the Human Potential Study*

Medium: Photography

Source: cited in Hoang, 2008b

**Appendix 29:**

**Hoang's book cover for *Report psychic stories***



A copy of the cover of the four books published by the Literature Association in Vietnam in 2008

Hoang was allowed to publish his reports in a series of four books in 2008.

Source: Hoang Anh Suong, 2014, pers. comm., 12 January



**Appendix 30:**

**Truong Tan's 2003 & 2004 installation art, *Untitled (Spiders)* and *Migrating birds*, mixed media**



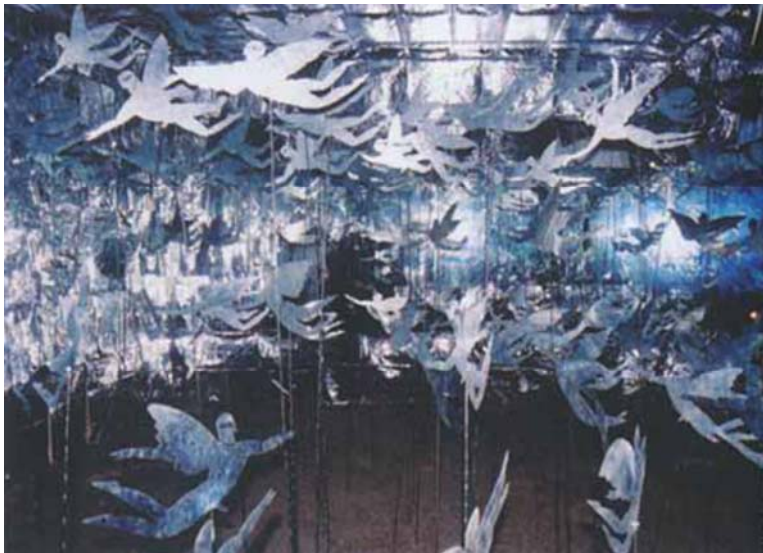
Artist: Truong Tan

Year: 2003

Title: *Untitled (Spiders)*

Material: mixed media, installation art

Source: Bui & Pham, 2011, p. 166



Artist: Truong Tan

Year: 2004

Title: *Migrating birds*

Material: mixed media, installation art

Source: Bui & Pham, 2011, p. 166

## Appendix 31:

### Bui's 2011 Artist's statement *Thang Thang*, exhibition catalogue, 2011

English version



Artist: Truong Tan

Year: 2011

A description of the artwork *Thang Thang*

Source: Bui Gallery 2011, p. 3

## // Trương Tân //

bui-gallery

THANG THANG

THANG THANG không rõ từ đâu sinh ra, ở Trung Quốc hay ở Nhật?

Cùng với 119 vị đã làm một cuộc viễn chinh ngàn dặm rời xa quê hương đến với dân gian phương Nam trong bộ bài tổ tôm, trên những chiếc chiếu hoa sồn rách nhạt màu của mấy ông già gầy mắt chòm xuyên đêm có đám râu xơ xác xỉn bạc, vài ngọn đèn dầu rập rình sáng, vừa đủ nhìn những quân bài xếp hình nan quạt trên tay che chắn dưới mái nhà có việc.

Hễ làng có tiệc, nhà có tiệc, họ tôi có tiệc, thì đàn ông được mời xơi rượu chiếu trên, đàn bà thu xếp chiếu dưới. Đàn bà nào có con nhỏ thì bồng bế nhau kéo đến - cả làng - rúm rít tranh phần ăn uống... Khi tiệc còn vương vãi khắp nơi, THANG THANG ôm con đến như một lời kêu mời của mấy ông già ngà ngà say chơi. Bài được chia ra mấy phần quây quần, một phần cổ bài trịnh trọng trên một cái đĩa nhỏ giữa chiếu. Bốc lấy cái, các ông vơ lấy quân bài của mình sắp chúng thành đôi thành cạ, ai nấy dán mắt vào đồ đen. Đèn, dầu, được đưa đến thêm rực cháy. Cuộc chơi bắt đầu... Ánh sáng làm tôi tò mò sán gần chiếu bạc. Ông chơi ông châu rìa chúi đầu xuýt xoa giục giã đánh. Trên tay dưới chiếu các quân bài hình người kỳ lạ rồi mù dấu má.

Bỗng tôi nhìn thấy trên chiếu một quân bài màu đỏ có một người đàn bà ôm con chẳng thèm ngó ngang đến mấy ông già nhăn nhoe mù mị tính bài đi đệt. Nhưng sao mẹ và con chỉ có một cái chân? Bà từ từ ngẩng đầu nhìn tôi không vẻ ngạc nhiên. Đứa trẻ vẫn yên ả bú. Tôi đã cảm giác bà như một cô tiên thanh thần đẹp đẽ. Bà đẹp không giống mẹ tôi, không giống những bà mẹ lam lũ quê tôi. Bà ở đâu ra? Bà từ đâu đến? Im lặng bà vẫn nhìn tôi. Thằng bé bà bế vẫn thủy chung ôm bầu vú căng tròn của mẹ mãi miết bú. Sao bà đẹp thế? Sao bà khác lạ thế? Đàn bà làng tôi có ai như bà đâu? Không giống bà. Sao bà lại ở đây? Thành linh bà cùng đứa con áo đỏ no sữa biến mất trong đám quân, tôi lưỡng lự rồi những câu hỏi triền miên để tìm bà, xem bà lướt nhanh đi đâu. Bài lại được tráo lên...

Đã nhiều năm chẳng thấy bà, tôi đã ít khi sán gần đám bạc, và người chơi đã không màng mấy cái trò có mẹ con bà tham gia. Chơi bây giờ uy lực động kinh hơn nhiều. Tôi nhớ, bỗng nhiên bà vụt xuất hiện. Lần này tôi không để bà ẩn đi nữa. Sau mấy chục năm trời, tôi đã họa lại bà và thằng bé. Tôi đã cố song không thể truyền thần nổi cái chân dung đêm đó. Đôi mắt của bà nhìn tôi với cái khung cảnh của đêm xa xưa chống vách, có những ông già da khô, từ lâu đã đập gậy ở cội bên kia. Nơi ấm ướt ánh sáng của đèn dầu le lói mỏng lung trong trí nhớ bé tí của tôi.

THANG THANG đến với tôi như thế. Tôi lấy tên bà đặt tên cho tác phẩm của tôi, tôi xây cho bà bức tường vững chãi để bà tựa thiên con bú. Để tôi có thể ngắm nhìn, để cứ tưởng tượng hình người tôi vẽ là đứa con của bà, để cứ băn khoăn nhằm lẫn không hiểu tại sao rằng chân thằng bé là chân của bà...



**Appendix 32:**

**Otto Dix's 1920 painting *The skat players*, oil on canvas**



Artist: Otto Dix

Year: 1920

Title: *The skat players*

Material: oil on canvas

Source: Retrieved from [www.ottodix.org](http://www.ottodix.org)

**Appendix 33:**

**Dao Anh Khanh's 2004 audiences, video picture**



Artist: Dao Anh Khanh

Year: 2004

Title: Audiences

Material: Video picture

Source: Retrieved from <http://www.webtretho.com/forum/f26/dao-anh-khanh-bi-duoi-khi-dien-tai-bai-song-hong>



**Appendix 34:**

**Dao Anh Khanh's 2004 *Revisiting spring*, photograph**



Artist: Dao Anh Khanh

Year: 2004

Title: *Revisiting spring*

Medium: Photograph

Source: Retrieved from (<http://vnexpress.net/dao-anh-khanh/topic-8001.html>)

**Appendix 35:**

**Dao Anh Khanh's 2004 *Revisiting spring*, photograph**



Artist: Dao Anh Khanh

Year: 2004

Title: *Revisiting spring*

Medium: Photograph

Source: Retrieved from <http://vnexpress.net/dao-anh-khanh/topic-8001.html>

**Appendix 36:**

**Dao Anh Khanh's 2004 *Lap tran*, photograph**



Source: Retrieved from <http://vnexpress.net/dao-anh-khanh/topic-8001.html>

## **Appendix 37:**

### **Vietnamese Feudalist Communism prior to 1975**

Marxism spread to Vietnam from Russia, (Ham, 2007, pp. 32- 33), and the Vietnamese communist government still used the traditional Confucianist leadership, especially in the Ho Chi Minh and Ngo Dinh Diem regimes prior to 1975. The practice of Confucian feudalism in both North and South during the Vietnam War, featuring the five Confucian characters that are mentioned in Appendix 1, in the Dai Viet period section, is presented by the two leaders Ho Chi Minh and Ngo Dinh Diem who showed their personal initiative from their Confucian construction of authority.

Ho Chi Minh demonstrated his Confucianist attitude when aiming to build the nation through his famous statement in 1954 as follows: 'Các vua Hùng đã có công dựng nước, bác cháu ta phải cùng nhau giữ nước.' Translated 'Many Hung kings had contributed to build our nation, you and I (Uncle) have to be together to keep our national independence.' A statement by Ho Chi Minh, 19 September, 1954 (Viet Cuong, 2014).

Ho Chi Minh points out that the nation and each individual have the same benefit at this period in Vietnamese history in this statement. He also places himself as 'the Uncle' of the nation and of every Vietnamese family. This is a significant Confucianist character through many feudalist dynasties. This concept has been modified in the current social movement through a group of conservative political leaders using the conservative traditional development and they tried to prevent pluralism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first Centuries in Vietnam and (Le 2012–14, pers. comm., December 2012 to April 2014).

## **Appendix 38:**

### **Vietnamese Democratic Communism**

The concept of socialism is not rooted in any policy but is shaped by the genius and traditions of a country (Dataray, 1965). In Vietnam a new socialism places special emphasis on the needs of small business, and the economy rapidly grew after the Doi Moi Policy was announced in 1986. The influences of the Western market are based on the values of freedom and democracy which also show in many aspects of Vietnamese social developments. The aims of a new Vietnamese society established after the Doi Moi Policy took place were the attainment of socialism through democratic enterprises. The government allowed some changes of leadership skills from the form of feudalism to the democratic communism (Thayer, 1991, pp. 21–33)

**Appendix 39:**  
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